

THE LABOUR PARTY
AND
POLITICAL CHANGE IN SCOTLAND
1918- 1929

The Politics of Five Elections

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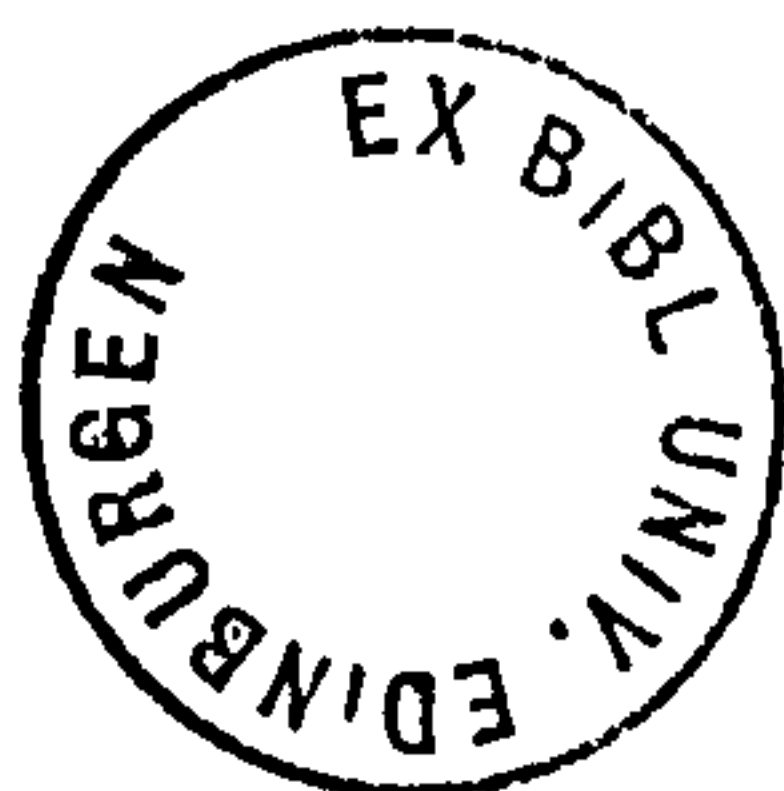


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INTRODUCTION

I THE ORIGINS OF MODERN BRITISH POLITICS

Our understanding of the modern British political system requires a fuller appreciation than we presently have of the political changes of the decade from 1918 to 1929. It was in this decade that mass politics were first established in Britain, that the electoral competition of Liberals and Conservatives alone (with Labour only a marginal force) was transformed into a Labour-Conservative-Liberal contest in which Labour and Conservative Parties triumphed, and that the dominant political ideologies underwent a transformation. While social and economic questions played a significant part in elections prior to 1914, from 1918 onwards they were the central issues and 'socialism' and 'anti-socialism' were presented as the central ideological themes.

The 'cauldron' in which the terms of modern politics were set was the period from 1918 to 1924, with the years of 1919 and 1920 of critical significance. It was in these years that Labour established itself as the alternative party of government, although socialism failed to establish itself as a dominant ideology. Few historians have been in any doubt as to the importance of these years. For Butler and Stokes the years which follow 1918 mark 'the making of the new alignment in British politics', 'a transition...accompanied by a fundamental change in the basis of party allegiance especially the rise of the class alignment which has dominated electoral politics since the inter-war period'.⁽¹⁾ Miliband has suggested that there are 'few years in the history of the Labour Movement more important than the immediate post-war years'.⁽²⁾ From a different perspective - the politics of the elite - Cowling has contended that the years which follow 1919

1 D Butler and D Stokes, Political Change in Britain, (London, 1969) p.172-181.

2 R Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism : A study in the politics of Labour (London, 1964) p.65.

witness 'the beginning of modern British politics'.⁽³⁾ The author of Lancashire and the new Liberalism, P F Clarke, whose thesis it is that progressive Liberalism had absorbed the growth of class consciousness prior to the First World War, is adamant that 'after 1918 we are in a different world',⁽⁴⁾ and Kendall writes that the period saw 'elements of real danger to the social order', demonstrating to him that in the immediate post-war years 'the crisis which British society faced... was probably the most serious since the time of the Chartists'.⁽⁵⁾

According to Ramsden, the historian of the Conservative Party, 'the Conservative victory of 1924 marked a watershed in British politics, the end of a period of transition',⁽⁶⁾ and Cook who argues that a distinction must be drawn between the downfall of the previously dominant Liberal Party and the decline of it, suggests that

The outcome of the crucial 1924 election was the virtual annihilation of the party. After this debacle with the Liberals reduced to parliamentary rump, the party was never again to be considered as a party of government. This factor underlay Lloyd George's failure in 1929.⁽⁷⁾

However the period from 1924 to 1929 was important also, even if less obviously so than the immediate post-war years. If the

3 M Cowling, The Impact of Labour: 1920-1924 (Cambridge, 1971).

4 P F Clarke, 'A Sociology of British Elections', History (1972) p.54.

5 W Kendall, The Revolutionary Movement in Britain: 1900-1921 (London, 1969) p.187.

6 J Ramsden, The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, 1902-40, (London, 1978), p.265.

7 C Cook, The Age of Alignment, (London, 1975), p.341.

revolutionary threat of the left and the Liberal threat to anti-socialist unity had faltered, it was not certain how modern politics would be shaped. From 1924 to 1929 we see the failure of Labour's Parliamentary left to capture political power within the party and the growth of a social reforming tradition within the forces of the right. By 1929 the differences between Labour and Conservative Parties may have appeared to the elector to be less matters of fundamental dispute than quantitative differences over how far economic and social reform should go.

In examining how the making of modern politics took place, the task of this introductory chapter is, first, to place the period 1918-1929 in its proper economic and social context; and, second, to examine the received explanations we have for the changes that took place and so place our examination of the period in proper historiographical context. Our focus is the electoral politics of Scotland. Nowhere had the Liberals before 1914 enjoyed such predominance, both in industrial and rural areas. Yet by 1929 the Conservative and Labour Parties dominated Scottish politics. In 1922, Scotland moved faster to Labour than other parts of the country. And in 1924, the Conservatives achieved a bigger victory in Scotland than at any time in the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. In 1929, the Liberals failed to recover most of the ground they had lost in the preceding election.

II THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT

The period from the 1900's to 1930's sees a change-over hastened by the First World War from one type of political economy to another, from what Joan Smith has called an era of 'Liberal hegemony' to an era of 'modern conservation'⁽¹⁾, with socialism failing to establish itself as a dominant ideology in its period of greatest possibilities, the years during and after the First World War. This was obviously somehow related to far-reaching economic change. Before World War One, Scotland was, first of all, one of the high growth and high employment regions of the United Kingdom. For example between 1880 and 1914, Scotland's relative position within the United Kingdom was improving, with its share of coal output rising from 12.4% to 14.8%, steel from 14.8% (taking the 1880-1884 average) to 20.8% (in 1910-1913) and shipbuilding retaining a third share of UK output. In 1913 Scotland's unemployment rate was only 1.8% (of the insured labour force) contrasted with 8.7% (in London)⁽²⁾. Secondly, Scotland had a more open economy - with indigenous control linked to the greater predominance of family firms, as opposed to joint stock companies, with limited opportunities for mergers, amalgamations and monopolies.

1 J Smith, Commonsense Thought and Working Class Consciousness: Some aspects of the Glasgow and Liverpool Labour Movements in the early years of the twentieth century. (Edinburgh University, PhD Thesis, 1981.)

2 For a fuller discussion of the Scottish economy in this period, see R Campbell, The Rise and Fall of Scottish Industry (Edinburgh, 1980), and A Slaven, The Development of the West of Scotland 1750-1960 (London, 1978).

As Scott and Hughes write of the early years of the twentieth century,

The Scottish business system still bore the signs of its origins in small family enterprises. Although the period from the 1890's to the First World War involved numerous company amalgamations, the new combines differed only a little from their predecessors... Amalgamation involved the fusion of independent family concerns into a holding structure in which there was little reorganisation at the technical or financial levels... Many dominant firms were either family firms, which had adopted the joint stock form concerns which had grown up on the basis of old family firms, or groups of family firms held together through a holding company. Only in the case of the railways and some newer firms in oil and electricity was the family principle not to be found. (3)

Third, Scotland appeared to be progressing before 1914. If wages did not match United Kingdom averages, they were rising faster than in the rest of Britain. And while Scotland's social problems were immense - for example, one half of Scots lived in one or two roomed houses - there were signs of social improvement, such as in the fall in infant mortality rates between 1871 and 1911. The Scottish Infant Mortality rate was actually below that of England and Wales⁽⁴⁾. If there were symptoms of a deeper malaise affecting the industrial economy, as the severity of the 1906-1908 recession indicated, and if Scotland was both overdependent on a small group of stable industries and suffering because of a high level of capital exported abroad (in preference to reinvestment in the home economy), it was still possible for politicians to argue that Scotland's economic difficulties were temporary and that the dominant trend was one of improvement.

3 M Scott and J Hughes, Anatomy of Scottish Capital, (London, 1979) pp.53-54.

4 For a fuller discussion of poverty and social policy, see I Levitt, 'The Scottish Poor Law and Unemployment, 1890-1929', in T Smout (ed), The Search for Wealth and Stability (London, 1979) pp 262-282.

These economic and social characteristics helped to determine political attitudes. While we shall see that middle class support veered towards Conservatism after 1886 and working class voters became dependent on Liberalism, the Liberals were after all a party of all Scotland - rural and industrial, east and west, Highland and Lowland - in a sense that no other party has since managed to be. Their support owed little to their political organisation or the representativeness of their candidates (in 1910, of fifty-nine Liberal MP's, twenty-five were lawyers, none were working men and many were Englishmen)⁽⁵⁾. Rather the resilience of Liberalism owed more to the relevance of the Liberal philosophy, as demonstrated by the appeal of the social and economic views posited by Gladstone in his Midlothian speeches, as early as 1879. As Joan Smith has argued from her study of Victorian Glasgow, that Liberal ideology consisted on a view of society which was participatory, localised and an interdependent but distinct "beehive" of societies and organisations. Liberals favoured municipal initiative in preference to state action, and opposed monopolies. They believed in progress and a society in which large numbers of people from all classes participated in society through their voluntary associations.⁽⁶⁾

By the late nineteen twenties, Scotland was a very different kind of economy and society. First, Scotland's economic base was contracting. While there is a historical debate on the extent and causes of the crisis, it is impossible to resist Alford's summation

5 C Larner, The Scottish MP since 1910 : His background and his performance, Xeroxed paper (Glasgow, 1969), p.4.

6 J Smith, op cit, p.168.

that 'the striking feature of the inter-war years in contrast with the late nineteenth century was the persistently wide margin of unemployed resources'⁽⁷⁾. Scotland's share of British output fell from 11.8% in 1907 to 10.5% in 1924 and only 8.8% in 1935⁽⁸⁾, and with around 10% of the British labour force, Scotland had nearly 15% of British unemployment throughout the inter-war years, with an estimated three fifths of the workforce experiencing at least one period of unemployment during the 1920's⁽⁹⁾. The most striking problems were in the staple industries - agriculture, mining, steel, engineering and textiles - which had formed the basis of Scotland's industrial progress before 1914. While in 1907, they represented more than half (53%) of all output, by 1924 they accounted for only 48% and by 1935 only 39% of output⁽¹⁰⁾.

7 B Alford, Depression and Recovery: British Economic Growth, 1918-1939, (London, 1972), p.82

8 C Harvie, No Gods and Precious Few Heroes, (London, 1981), p.36.

9 E Kibblewhite, The Impact of Unemployment on the Development of Trade unionism in Scotland, Aberdeen University, PhD. 1979 pp.70-71.

10 C Harvie, op.cit., p.38.

TABLE 0.1

The Performance of Scotland's Basic Industries, 1911-1929

	West Scotland Coal m.tons	Scotland Pig Iron m.tons	Scotland Steel m.tons	Scotland Shipbuilding Clyde launching m.tons
1911-13	22.7	1.32	1.3	676.0
1918-20	17.1*	0.97	1.8	617.2
1927-29	16.8	0.61	1.3	544.3

* 1919 only

Source : Glasgow Herald, Annual Trade Reviews, cited in A Slaven,
op cit., p.164.

Table 0.1 illustrates the difficulties faced by coal, iron and steel and shipbuilding after the war. As early as 1921, officials in the Scottish Office realised that Scotland's economic problems were permanent, rather than temporary. Diagnosing a picture of 'unrelieved blackness' a confidential report remarked:

The main belt of severe unemployment and accompanying distress runs through the mining, steel and shipbuilding areas of Fife, Edinburgh, Stirling, Linlithgow, Lanark, Dumbarton, Renfrew and Ayr...It is difficult to pick out any industrial occupation as being principally affected by unemployment, almost all are in bad condition.

The report suggested that 'those engaged in export trade and the means of export are worse than those engaged in home trade' while only 'certain luxury services' were 'remarkably vigorous'. It added that an estimated 25,000 miners were in excess of capacity of the mines to absorb them for years to come.⁽¹¹⁾

11 'Reports and Memorandum by the Board of Health into Industrial Unemployment and Distress, 1921', Scottish Record Office HR 31/36.

In fact in spite of a net emigration of one third of a million Scots between 1921 and 1931, unemployment was never less than .10% throughout the inter-war years. The numbers in metal industries and mining fell dramatically between the 1921 and 1931 censuses, by 23% and 18% respectively⁽¹²⁾. Shipbuilding whose Clyde output had fallen-four fold between 1920 and 1923 employed 100,000 workers in 1920 but only 50,000 in 1925 and only 10,000 in 1932⁽¹³⁾.

Second, Scotland's economy was becoming increasingly corporate in its organisation. As Scott and Hughes suggests three trends stand out in the inter-war years, "economic concentration anglicisation of control and the growth of government regulation"⁽¹⁴⁾.

By 1923, mergers had brought three of Scotland's seven banks into the hands of English banks. With steel, coal and shipbuilding amalgamations, Colville's became a centre for the integration of steel, shipbuilding and shipping interests in the West of Scotland. This development was closely associated with the rise of Lithgow in shipbuilding and together these firms were to become the pivot of Scottish heavy industry. In whisky distillers, in brewing Scottish Brewers, and in textiles Jute industries, (with Coats and Linen Thread) became dominant, and the rail companies became part of London dominated cartels. As Scott and Hughes suggest:

Expansion of these companies tended to occur through the direct acquisition of other companies rather than through the older holder company form. Monopolisation in each of the major industrial sectors was producing the large corporations of the modern period. This does not seem to have resulted in any straightforward separation of ownership from control. Companies still seem to have been controlled through ownership of a substantial shareholding and family control remained a reality (15).

12 E Kebblewhite, op cit., p.30.

13 Ibid, op cit., p.21.

14 J Scott and M Hughes, op cit., p.67.

15 Ibid, p.88. There was even what Harvie called 'vertical cartellization' with shipping, shipbuilding and steel closely linked.

As industry became more corporate, trade unionism became more concentrated. The war had seen a doubling of trade union membership and at its peak, Scotland's trade unionists numbered half a million, a third of the working population. When in 1924-25 the STUC conducted its only major survey of trade union membership in Scotland it found that the concentration of membership was such that despite there being 227 individual unions, four-fifths of trade unionists were in the largest thirty-six unions. In addition, three-fifths of Scotland's trade unionists by 1924 were affiliated to British rather than specifically Scottish trade unions⁽¹⁶⁾. Although religions retained a loyalty that was far stronger than in England, with 26% of the adult population adhering to the reunited Church of Scotland in 1930 and 11% members of the Roman Catholic Church (whereas in England the Church of England had only 11% of the adult population), it was increasingly clear that class-based loyalties were most prominent⁽¹⁷⁾. One sign of this was that the Scottish Cooperative organisation which had been an independent association detached from political activity joined the Labour cause. In 1917, the Scottish Co-operatives made much of the running for affiliation of the British organisation to the Labour Party⁽¹⁸⁾.

However, the economic problems Scotland faced hit different groups unevenly, and their social importance must be measured not only against the experience of the changing occupational and industrial characteristics of the Scottish labour force but also against the expectations fostered by the war. As one writer put it:

16 Scottish Trades Union Congress, Report to 1925 Congress.

17 C Harvie, op cit., p.78.

18 A full study of the Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society has been made by J A Kinlock, The Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society 1868-1918, Strathclyde University PhD, 1976. See also S Pollard, 'The Foundation of the Co-operative Party' in A Briggs and J Saville, Essays in Labour History 1886-1923, (London, 1971) p.185-210.

The combined effects of wartime inflation, occupational mobility, the virtual disappearance of the unemployed residuum and the narrowing of wage differentials had significantly raised the aspirations and expectations of wage earners as a whole... Labour's sense of relative deprivation had somehow to be reduced if the stability of British society in the post war society was to be ensured(19).

Generally, the twenties saw little redistribution of income between rich and poor, despite the growth of taxation on both low and high incomes. What redistribution in wealth which did take place in the period was within the top fifth of the population and not from rich to poor⁽²⁰⁾. There was however to be a considerable degree of upward mobility, with large numbers added to white-collar occupations between 1921 and 1931⁽²¹⁾. Probably it was outward mobility through emigration more so than upward mobility through education that did most to lessen the potential tensions in Scottish society.

19 K Burgess, The Challenge of Labour, (London, 1980) p.205.

20 A Harrison, The Distribution of Personal Wealth in Scotland (Strathclyde University, 1975) shows wealth inequalities remained stable. It seems also that direct and indirect taxation as a percentage of total income did not alter the class structure of the twenties, apart from perhaps affecting those with incomes above £10,000. The share of national income for wages between 1920 and 1929 remained stable. In his The Social Framework Hicks gauges the redistributive effect of social service expenditure to be small not least because of the operation of the insurance principle. For a fuller comment on the questions, see A C Saunders and D Jones, A Survey of the Social Structure of England and Wales (Oxford, 1958) and Sir J Hicks, The Social Framework, 3rd.ed., (Oxford, 1960).

21 In No Gods and Precious Few Heroes, C Harvie concludes: 'Although economic change seems to have increased class polarisation the institutions of Scottish society actually inhibited the development of a positive class consciousness in Scotland. They provided means of spiralling out of the working class... and they also created... a range of middle class organisations and leadership roles'. (p.87).

More than 400,000 Scots left the country during the nineteen twenties. It was a group that contained a disproportionate number of lower middle class and skilled manual workers⁽²²⁾.

Unemployment was a sharp dividing line. To some extent it was softened by changes in national insurance and the poor law but the general prospects for the unemployed person were poor⁽²³⁾. As Levitt has shown, poor law relief benefits for the unemployed were between 37-50% of average wages in the nineteen-twenties. A special Clydeside survey in 1923-24, which followed the Scottish Office study of 1921, confirmed how necessary public relief was to combat the worst effects of the depression, and, in particular, the problems facing mothers with young children. Although a follow-up survey of 1930 suggested the majority of families were 'adjusting' to poverty, it was clear to officials, as Levitt suggests, that the social fabric of Scotland was dependent on the Poor Law and its ability to respond to the pressures of unemployment⁽²⁴⁾. The officials knew that in spheres like medical care Scottish provision now lagged behind England. In the post war period Scottish infant mortality was higher than in England and Wales though national comparisons disguised very large regional variations in each country. But the position of many wage earners in the first part of the twenties was deteriorating also, as the wage increases won

22 M Flinn et al, Scottish Population History (Cambridge, 1977). They estimate that net emigration ran at 28,000 per annum between 1901 and 1910 but 35,000 per annum between 1921 and 1930. Between 1901 and 1930, 446,212 Scots left but only 98,464 came to Scotland, in all a net loss of 347,748 virtually wiping out the natural increase in population.

23 B Gilbert, British Social Policy 1918-1938 (London, 1970). He argues in particular that the result of the first two years of post-war government social policy was 'a vast system of working class relief'. (p.32).

24 I Levitt, Poverty in Scotland: The Historical Background, Appendix One. G Brown and R Cook (ed.) : Scotland: The Real Divide. (Edinburgh 1982, forthcoming). See also I Levitt, in T Smout (ed.) op.cit., pp262-282.

from 1914 to 1920 were eroded, as Table 0.2 confirms, and money wages did not recover before 1927. Waites has suggested that real wages were actually lower in 1923, 1924, and 1925 than they had been in July 1914⁽²⁵⁾.

Social tensions were potentially greater in Scotland not least because Scotland had had a higher preponderance of skilled workers - especially in West Scotland where it was estimated that 70% of Scots workers were 'skilled'. No less important was the position of the miners, who numbered more than a tenth of the labour force in 1921, and who regarded themselves on a par with the 'labour aristocracy' of skilled workers. For Hobsbawm, 'the period from 1914 was to see the collapse of the labour aristocracy comparable to the collapse of the old handicrafts in the decades after the Napoleonic wars, though perhaps more serious,' and trade unionists at the time did not disagree that 'the gulf which at one time divided the skilled from the unskilled is disappearing'⁽²⁶⁾. Kebblethwite has suggested that the dilution of engineering work was so great that whereas in 1914, 60% of workers were skilled, by 1926 and 1933 respectively, only 40% and 32% were,⁽²⁷⁾ and the new compression of the occupational structure was reflected in both wage levels and security of employment. In building, engineering, mining and craft work, the gulf between skilled and semi-skilled or unskilled wages narrowed considerably between 1914 and 1930, as the failure of industrial action amongst

25 B Waites. 'The Effect of the First World War on Class and Status in England,' Scottish Labour History Society Journal, 12, 1978. p.3-10.

26 STUC Conference, 1925, Chairman's Introductory Speech.

27 E Kebblethwite, op cit., p.313. According to her study of firms in the Engineering Employers Federation, the proportion of semi-skilled workers rose from 20% in 1914 to 30% in 1921 and again to 45% and 57% in 1926 and 1933. Skilled proportions for these years were 60% (1914); 50% (1921); 40% (1926); and 32% (1933).

the engineers and miners confirmed this trend. While labourers still experienced a higher likelihood of unemployment, what is startling about the nineteen-twenties in contrast to pre-war years is the severity of unemployment amongst iron, steel, shipbuilding, and mining workers. A measure of the erosion of their position can be gauged in Table 0.3 from the declining union memberships in engineering and mining in particular between 1919 and 1929, although it can also be seen how the depression affected almost every group⁽²⁸⁾.

- 28 In his Condition of the British People 1911-1945, ((London, 1945) p.82). Abrams suggests that whereas before 1914 unskilled wages were 60% of skilled rates, by 1919 they had increased to 75%. The main exponent of this thesis that the position of skilled workers was eroded is E Hobsbawm, Labouring Men, (London, 1964) pp.272-363. Whereas unskilled workers in building received in 1914, 64% of craftsmen's wages, the proportion in 1922 was 75%; in printing, the gap which was pre-war 33% between craftsmen and labourers had narrowed by 1922 to 20%. Studies carried out into wage trends in the interwar years showed that the lowest rises in real wages occurred in iron and steel, shipbuilding, mining, construction, and textiles (whereas the biggest rises occurred in agriculture, fishing, printing, transport, communications, distributive trades and local government services). There were of course as Hobsbawm suggests 'survivals and adaptation' not least the expansion of a full time trade union bureaucracy. It would appear that the engineers, boilermakers, iron founders and miners were the worst hit, as they were squeezed by the narrowing of differentials, the rise of the semi-skilled, and the growth of a white collar sector.

TABLE 0.2

Prices and Wages - 1914-25

1914 = 100

	Money Wages	Cost of Living	Real Wages
1914	100	100	100
1920	256	249	103
1921	240	226	106
1922	185	183	107
1923	169	174	97
1924	171	175	98
1925	175	176	99

Source: B Waites, op.cit. pp 3-10; also

Forward, February 16, 1925 and September 29, 1925.

TABLE 0.3

Union Memberships in Scotland 1919 and 1929

000's

	1919	1929
Engineers	44.7	18.6
Woodworkers	16.5(1922)*	16.2
Electricians	3.0	1.5
Miners	75.0	25.0(1926)*
Railwaymen	43.5	30.5
Printers	8.2	6.0
Commercial	16.0	9.3
Horse/Motormens Transport	5.2	5.0
General	29.5	21.2
Shop Assistants	11.5	10.7
Distributive	14.0(1920)*	13.1

Source: Table compiled from E Kebbleshwite, op.cit., Appendix One.

Asterisk denotes year nearest to 1919 and 1929 for which figures available.

III EXPLAINING POLITICAL CHANGE 1918-29

While social and economic changes affected the position of employed and unemployed in Scotland, it is not useful for the historian to pose a determinist relationship when viewing the connection between social forces and political attitudes or political change. Political life often exercises an independence that forbids any automatic equation between the existence of class divisions and either class consciousness, class conflict or a socialist consciousness. These are not interchangeable terms. As Michael Mann writes:

Firstly we can separate class identity - the definition of oneself as playing a distinctive role in common with other workers in the productive process. Secondly comes class consciousness - the perception that the capitalist and his agents constitute an enduring opponent to oneself...Thirdly is class totality - the acceptance of the previous elements as the defining characteristic of one's total social situation and the whole society in which one lives. Finally comes the conception of an alternative society, a goal toward which one moves through the struggle with the opponent(1).

In other words, it cannot be presupposed that the existence of class divisions will produce a socialist consciousness on the part of the working class. Indeed it might be argued that Mann's argument might have been taken further. Political change requires in addition a sense on the part of social groups that change can be achieved, and, in cases, a loss of confidence by political elites. Our task is to understand how the changes of the period 1918 to 1929 took place, for even if the fact of political change could have been predicted, its form and content could not. In the decade from 1918 onwards, we must understand the reshaping of party politics not only in terms of political organisations but also in a context where modern politics was being created in the interplay between industrial militancy and economic depression, the gap between promises and performance in the social and economic

1 M Mann, Consciousness and Action Among the Western Working Class, (London, 1973), p.13.

policies pursued by Coalition, Labour and Conservative Governments, and the ideological differences between and within the major political parties.

The view that political changes occurred independently of the social and economic forces which were at work in Scottish society is held by many writers. They tend to take as their exclusive concern the activities of a small group of central politicians and to view the Labour achievement as neither inevitable nor historically necessary. Thus in his Downfall of the Liberal Party and in subsequent work, Trevor Wilson concludes that the political events of the war, personal antagonism between Lloyd George and Asquith, and the consequent collapse of Liberal morale and organisation made possible Labour's rise to prominence and the Conservative successes of the twenties⁽²⁾. In his History of the Liberal Party, Roy Douglas, who consciously sets out to be an apologist for the Liberal Party, documents a series of 'accidents' and 'miscalculations' between the Gladstone Macdonald pact of 1903, and the preparedness of Liberals to allow Labour into office in 1924, to demonstrate his general thesis that 'what failed not Liberalism but Liberals'⁽³⁾. In his study, The Impact of Labour - exclusively the study of politics at the top - it is the thesis of Cowling that although events outside Parliament 'created an atmosphere which no politician could ignore', the response of the political elite towards Labour - knowledge for example that Labour leaders were only 'paper tigers', Conservative antipathy towards elements of the Liberal Party, and the desire of Bonar Law and Baldwin for independence from Lloyd George - is central to accounting for the short term progress of the Labour Party and the long term triumph of the Conservative Party as the major governing party. Within a tradition of British political study which assumes politics to be an activity conducted within the traditional

2 T Wilson, The Downfall of the liberal Party, 1914-1935, (London, 1966).

3 R Douglas, A History of the Liberal Party, 1895-1970, (London, 1971), p.3.

political system and where voters and party activists are more passive tools than active agents of political change, Cowling argues that:

In these years the Labour leaders committed themselves to the politics they found established and in all important respects the politics of 1920-1924 were continuous with the politics of the previous ninety years : the polarisation of rhetoric did not produce a polarisation of action : social inequality was preserved by collusive collaboration to make rhetoric not action the centre of dispute. That was why conflict was synthetic.(4)

A second approach which is more satisfactory is to concentrate on the political impact of the changing economic and social characteristics of British society. Thus Pelling argues that the rise of Labour, and the decline of the Liberals, was neither due to intrigues between Lloyd George and Coalition leaders nor simply to the impact of the war on Liberal values or Liberal unity. He argues that 'it was the result of long term social and economic changes which were simultaneously uniting Britain geographically and dividing her inhabitants in terms of class'(5). For Cook the Liberal malaise sprang from 'fundamental and long term characteristics in the structure, social composition, and outlook of the (Liberal) Party in the major industrial and mining areas', although he adds:

Though part of the explanation, social and economic forces were not wholly responsible for the Liberal downfall. Rather it was a succession of political blows coming on top of the changing social structure that reduced the Liberal Party from supremacy to impotence.(6)

Few historians of the Labour Party deny the importance of both class divisions and a growing sense of their importance as explanations for the party's advance (of the Party). But few

4 M Cowling, op.cit., p.6.

5 M Pelling, Popular Politics and Society in the late Victorian England, (London, 1968) pp.101-120.

6 C Cook, The Age of Alignment, op.cit., p.342-3.

are agreed on what that growing sense of class consciousness meant in real terms. Conventional historians of the Labour Party emphasise the organisational achievement of Labour, the extension into the political arena of the power of trade unionism, and the development of a strong party bureaucracy. For example McKibbin argues that Labour's increased support was grounded 'upon a highly developed class consciousness and intense class loyalties'⁽⁷⁾. But, for McKibbin, the extension of the franchise was the important factor in determining the post-war Labour advance. While admitting it impossible to demonstrate, for example, whether the 1922 election, if fought on 1910 boundaries but under the new franchise, would have yielded a similar Labour breakthrough, he and others argue against those who suggest that there were important social and ideological changes in these years, especially as a result of the war⁽⁸⁾. Thus for Matthew, McKibbin and Kay, the right to vote on top of growing trade unionisation made Labour's advance possible⁽⁹⁾. It is an argument in line with the conventional picture drawn by Samuel Beer in Modern British Politics that Labour's advance had little to do with the progress of socialism, and that the adoption of socialism, explicit in the 1918 constitution, merely signalled the party's arrival as a major political force and was functional 'to the working class thrust for power'. It was 'the consequence of the more basic decision to play for supremacy taken by the organised working class'.

7 R McKibbin, The Evolution of the Labour Party, 1910-1924, (London, 1974), Introduction.

8 J Matthew, R McKibbin, J Kay, 'The Franchise Factor in the Rise of the Labour Party', English Historical Review, 92 (1976) p.796. They suggest - 'under a genuinely democratic pre-war franchise Labour would have been a more effective rival of the other parties than it actually was...the disproportion between their strengths (Liberal and Labour) would have been significantly less and diminishing'.

9 Ibid., p.796. They argue against those who 'assumed that in the event of manhood franchise coming before 1914, the newly enfranchised... would have voted in the same proportion as the existing electorate, even though the mass of the new voters came from different social classes or subclasses.

The growth of trade unionism at last provided the party with the means for a strategy of fully fledged independence. Moreover the increase in organisational power of the unions did more than merely provide an opportunity for this strategy. It also forced the Labour Party to adopt it and break politically with the Liberals. The adoption of socialism as an ideology was functional to the choice of political independence(10).

But for others the franchise changes were a necessary but not a sufficient explanation of Labour's advance,⁽¹¹⁾ and some pose a more sociological explanation of how Labour's advance was achieved, suggesting that the growth of collective organisation (in accompaniment with the franchise) may be insufficient to explain the nature of the Labour Party and the extent and limits of the party's advance. In a series of articles, Parkin has attempted to relate political behaviour - and especially working class political preferences - to value systems. He argues that whereas the institutions of society are important in defining people's values, Labour voting is 'a symbolic act of defiance', made possible and sustained through the collectivist values of working class communities, created by industrial workers through their collective experience at work. Parkin distinguishes between the dominant value system (whose social source is the major institutional order) which provides an ideological framework for endorsing existing inequalities, leading to deferential or aspirational definitions of the reward structure (i.e. conservatism); the subordinate value

10 S Beer, Modern British Politics, (London, 1965), p.151-2.

11 The Matthew McKibbin and Kay view is disputed, as Chapter One suggests, by P F Clarke, 'The Electoral impact of the Liberal and Labour Parties, 1910-1914,' English Historical Review, 91, 1975, and in his subsequent article, 'Liberals, Labour and the franchise,' Ibid, 93, 1977 pp.182-190.

system (the social source of which is the local working class community); and the radical value system, the source of which is a mass party, which provides an oppositional interpretation of class inequalities (i.e. socialism). Parkin suggests that in the light of the failure of the Labour Party to relate people's experience to the wider political order, the standard working class response is one of accommodation, what he terms 'a negotiated form of dominant values'. In a sophisticated argument, which accepts a modified version of Parkin's theories as relevant to the new political situation after World War One, Chamberlain argues that Labour's rise was due neither to changes within the political elites nor primarily to people's adoption of socialist ideology but more to the existence of sub-cultures in British society which provided 'the necessary structural supports for Labour voting', first, working class community life in which collectivist values developed and, second, the value system created by industrial workers in response to the organisation of production and their collective experiences at the work place. Thus, while many voters embraced Labour because Labour ideology made sense of their social position as trade unionisation rose and class consciousness became pronounced, there were very good reasons why other manual workers did not.

Manual workers do not vote Conservative because they are deferential or because they conceive of themselves as middle class: rather they have a conservative outlook when they are isolated from structural positions which provide an alternative normative system from that of the dominant institutional orders of society(12).

In examining these various approaches to the development of modern politics the concentration of our attention is on the years 1918 to 1929. This is not to argue that the political achievement of the

12 F Parkin, 'Working Class Conservatives : A Theory of Political Deviance,' British Journal of Sociology 18, No. 3, (1967). The argument is extended in F Parkin, Class Inequality and Political Order (London, 1971). Chamberlain's article is contained in British Journal of Sociology, 24, 1973, pp.474-489.

Labour Party can be encapsulated into an eleven year period which begins twenty five years after the founding of the Independent Labour Party and nearly twenty years after the forging of the Labour Party between socialists and trade unionists. As E P Thompson argues in his essay, 'Homage to Tom Maguire', there could have been no Labour Party without the decision of socialists in the eighteen eighties to break with the traditional two party system of the day,⁽¹³⁾ and our examination of the post-war period does not diminish the importance to later years of the resurgence of socialism in the eighteen eighties and the socialist agitation of the I.L.P. in particular from the eighteen nineties onwards. Nor does our examination of the post-war period deny the importance of the changes brought about by the First World War's impact on society. Winter has argued:

The war-time compression of the class pyramid is reflected both in the merger of the Conservative and Liberal Parties and also in the reorganisation of the Labour Party as the voice of more than the manual working class, or, as Webb liked to call them, the workers by hand and by brain⁽¹⁴⁾.

Winter suggests that not only the advance of the Labour Party but the nature of its socialism is determined by the experience of war:

Clause Four is incomprehensive outside the context of a war in which (1) Class collaboration and not ouvrierism determined the political and industrial response of the party leadership and the vast majority of its working class supporters; (2) In which there was an improvement in the standards of the working class which change both heightened expectations of the working class of social reform and kept those hopes channeled within the traditional party structure; (3) In which the Russian Revolution made the formation of a left alternative to Bolshevism both necessary and inevitable; and (4) in which political alliances between middle class intellectual and trade unionists in defence of working class interests were established as permanent fixtures in the labour movement.

13 E Thompson, 'Homage to Tom Maguire,' in A Briggs, J Saville (eds.) Essays in Labour History, (London, 1967), pp.276-316.

14 J Winter, 'A Note on the Reconstruction of the Labour Party in 1918,' Scottish Labour History Society Journal, 12, (1978) p.68.

Most commentators have suggested, in spite of their diverse approaches, and theoretical stances, that either the growth of class consciousness or the effect of war had in 1918 made Labour's political advance inevitable. But even if that were so, it would, in 1918, have been impossible to predict the nature of the Labour Party or the political system over the next ten years, in particular how the cross currents between socialist rhetoric, industrial militancy, economic depression and social reform would conspire to produce a new order, stability and equilibrium in Britain.

What the historian gains in breadth he also loses in depth. Although this study extends its range to a period of eleven years, it is primarily a study of the politics of electoral competition in Scotland. While some attempt is made to relate the events in Scotland to the ideological and political changes that characterise the period in the whole of Britain, and also to place these changes in their local context, much more study is undoubtedly required of particular events and issues such as the impact of the Irish question on Scottish politics⁽¹⁵⁾ and of the experience of individual communities and constituencies. There are however, now excellent studies both of some of the events of the period, such as the General Strike in Scotland,⁽¹⁶⁾ and of industrial and political

15 D Rollo, Comparative Aspects of Irish Politics in Glasgow, Boston and New York, Edinburgh University B.Litt., 1971; M Tobin, The Irish Question and the Emergence and Development of the Labour Party in Britain 1910-1924, Strathclyde University M.Litt., 1980, are two important contributions to the study of the importance of the Irish in Scottish and British politics.

16 There are now a considerable number of studies of the impact and events of the General Strike of 1926, in particular J Skelley, The General Strike of 1926, (London, 1976) which contains two excellent local studies of East and West Scotland. In addition, the atmosphere in Fife is revealed most clearly in I Macdougall (ed) Militant Miners (Edinburgh, 1981).

developments in certain areas, in particular Aberdeen⁽¹⁷⁾, Dundee⁽¹⁸⁾, Ayrshire⁽¹⁹⁾, Glasgow⁽²⁰⁾, and communities in Fife⁽²¹⁾, Dunbartonshire⁽²²⁾, and Kincardineshire⁽²³⁾. Despite the mushrooming of local history, we need fuller studies of other areas of Scotland, in particular the development of politics in rural areas, despite James Hunter's seminal work, The Making of the Crofting Community⁽²⁴⁾.

The study which follows is thus primarily a study of electoral politics in the five elections from 1918 to 1929, with all limitations that such an examination entails. As John Vincent has observed, electoral data show 'only the outward and visible signs of an invisible political situation which has to be intuitively appreciated in the light of many variables'. He writes of election results:

- 17 C Phipps, The Aberdeen Town Council and Politics, 1900-1935. The Development of a Local Labour Party in Aberdeen, University of Aberdeen, M.Litt., 1980.
- 18 W Walker, Juteopolis, (Edinburgh, 1979).
- 19 A Trevis, The Development of the Labour Movement in Ayrshire, 1914-1926, Strathclyde University, M.Litt., 1980
- 20 I McLean, The Labour Movement in Clydeside Politics, 1914-1924, Oxford University, D.Phil., Also, P Liddell, The Glasgow Trades Council, Strathclyde University, M.Litt., 1977, and J Smith, op.cit.
- 21 I Macdougall, (ed)., Militant Miners, (Edinburgh, 1981).
- 22 S McIntyre, Little Moscows, (Oxford, 1980).
- 23 M Dyer, The Politics of Kincardineshire, Aberdeen University, PhD, 1967.
- 24 J Hunter, The Making of the Crofting Community, (Edinburgh, 1976).

They speak of the relation of the many to the few for that is by definition what they are. They show how the many react to the few, how the few are constrained to respond to the many, while at the same time making them enter a situation which the many alone had not created(25).

25 J Vincent and M Stenton, Macalmonds Parliamentary Pollbooks, (London, 1973) p. lx.

CHAPTER 1 - THE 1918 ELECTION

I NEW POLITICS AND OLD POLITICS

The 1918 election stands midway between an old world of politics and a new one. The crucial change in the electoral system that was to make the new politics possible had occurred by the time of the 1918 election - through the extension of the franchise to all men over twenty one and all women over thirty. In 1867, only 7% of the adult population had been able to vote. After the Second Reform Act, the electorate rose to 16% of adults. In 1885 after the Third Act, it was 28%⁽¹⁾. Thus before 1918, all women and nearly 40% of all men were disenfranchised⁽²⁾. In Scotland it was estimated that in 1911 only 57.3% of men in the burghs and 62.5% of men in the counties had the vote⁽³⁾. With plural voting (estimated to account for 7% of the pre-1918 electorate), the disqualification of electors receiving poor relief other than medical relief and the difficulties associated with registration, Pelling has calculated that only 89 British constituencies were predominantly working class⁽⁴⁾ and Macaffrey has shown how only one half of eligible Irish working men had the vote in 1910⁽⁵⁾. These are probably as useful indications as any of the electoral arithmetic which militated against the success of a party appealing entirely to the working class.

1 C Chamberlain, op.cit., p.474.

2 N Blewitt, The Peers, the Parties and the People, (London, 1972), p.359.

3 Matthew, McKibbin and Kay, 'The franchise factor in the rise of the Labour Party,' English Historical Review, 92, (1976), p.727. There were of course wide variations within Scotland, as the authors suggest. Enfranchisement ran at 79.7% of adult males in Inverness Burghs but only 40.6% of adult males in Glasgow Bridgeton.

4 H M Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections, (London, 1967), pp.410-420.

5 J Macaffrey, 'The Irish Vote in Glasgow in the late Nineteenth Century,' Innes Historical Review, 24, 1970, pp.30-37. Macaffrey's estimate is made from a comparison of potential voters with a study of rate books.

With both the extension of voting rights and the redistribution of constituency boundaries, the electoral geography of Scotland in 1918 was for the first time dominated by working class constituencies. This was to remain the case throughout the twenties and was further increased by the extension of the vote to working class women in time for the 1929 election. By 1929, 90% of adults over twenty-one were on the voting register⁽⁶⁾. If we were to define seats with more than 20% of voters in middle class occupations, then only three of more than one hundred middle class constituencies of Britain were in Scotland⁽⁷⁾. There were, of course, also constituencies which were dominated by a large agricultural vote. While there were only twelve constituencies which, according to a study of the 1921 census, had more than half the employed men engaged in agriculture (of which only one Aberdeenshire Central was in Scotland), Scotland did have twenty of the 141 seats in Britain with more than one quarter of men employed in agriculture. Sixteen of these had more than thirty per cent in agriculture and eight had more than forty per cent⁽⁸⁾. If we were to take the middle class and agricultural seats together (allowing for an overlap in East Perthshire), then there remained twenty-two seats which were not dominated by the industrial working class vote. Of the forty-nine constituencies, twelve had more than 20% of employed men in mining (and in fact ten had more than 30%, and four more than 40%)⁽⁹⁾. It will be seen that these were the seats that moved fastest to the Labour Party in the nineteen twenties.

6 According to Matthew et al, there was still a small proportion of British adults excluded. They estimated adult male enfranchisement to be 94.1% of adult males in 1921. Only 79.2% of females aged thirty and over had the vote. These were British estimates. Matthew, McKibbin and Kay, op.cit., p.732.

7 D Butler and A Soman, British Political Facts, (London, 1968) p.200.
M Kinnear, The British Voter : An atlas and survey since 1885, (New York, 1960) p.122-3.

8 Ibid., p.119-20.

9 Ibid., p.116-7.

Scottish Liberalism dominated the electoral geography of Scotland throughout the nineteenth and the early years of the twentieth century. The Liberals won every Scottish election from 1832 to 1914 with one exception. The only time they failed to win a majority of seats was in the general election of 1900 but in the three elections which followed, in 1906, and in January and December, 1910, the Liberals appeared to recover their position, winning 57.6%, 55.8% and 53.3% of the total votes. As Henry Pelling demonstrates, Scotland from 1885 to 1910 exhibited a marked aversion to Conservatism, with the Conservatives (with or without Liberal Unionists) receiving on average only 40.3% of the votes - the lowest regional share in Britain - in the six elections within this period⁽¹⁰⁾. The swing from Liberals to Conservatives which took place in Britain between 1906 and 1910 almost passed Scotland by, with the Conservatives failing to make significant headway in January 1910 and only marginally improving their position in December.

But if Scottish politics before 1914 seemed stable, things were not static. From 1885 to 1914 the Liberals transformed themselves into a party of primarily working-class voters, while the Conservatives concentrated on attracting the middle-class vote. Urwin has written of Scottish politics in the late nineteenth century, that: 'Conservative activity occurred in a political and social milieu which was organisationally and fundamentally opposed to the ideas and philosophy of Toryism,'⁽¹¹⁾ and Blewitt states any new electoral

10 H Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections, op.cit. pp372-413. See also N Blewitt, The Peers, The Parties and the People : The General Elections of 1910, (London, 1972). Between 1906 and January 1910 the swing against Liberalism and to Conservatism was only 1.8% in Scotland contrasted with 4.3% in Britain; between January and December 1919, it was 1.8% contrasted with 0.8% in Britain.

11 D Urwin, Scottish Historical Review, 44, (1965), p.90.

alignment had 'scarcely begun in Scotland by the end of 1885', the Conservatives being an 'impotent minority' holding one third of the votes, and one seventh of the seats⁽¹²⁾. But in the 1886 election there was a swing of more than 7% from the Liberals as they lost 19 seats, mainly to the newly formed Liberal Unionists. One in every five of Liberal Unionist members in 1886 came from Scotland and with few exceptions Scottish industrial capital moved towards Conservatism. Macaffrey who has studied the Liberal split in the West of Scotland has written:

After 1886 political behaviour in the West of Scotland became more clearly differentiated along class lines with the Gladstonians enjoying the support of the labouring masses as the Liberal Unionists drew closer in spirit and practice to the Conservatives.(13)

Nevertheless, changing class alignments did not mean that Scotland had absorbed a switch to modern politics. Much depended on the nature of the political issues that were prominent. The 1910 elections testify more to the prominence of the old issues - anti-landlordism in particular - than to the growth of welfare politics. As Austen Chamberlain was to remark:

Our only chance of winning Scotland is to change the issues on which Scotsmen vote. As long as it is the land and the rest of the radical programme we shall be beaten. We must try to make them think of something else and that something else can only be tariff reform.(14)

In fact Scottish demonstrations which had taken place in support of Lloyd George's budget in 1909, were more of an anti-landlord character⁽¹⁵⁾.

12 Blewitt, op.cit., p.7.

13 J Macaffrey, Scottish Historical Review, 50 (1971) p.149.

14 A Chamberlain, Politics from Inside, (London, 1936), p.198.

15 Glasgow Herald, September 20, 1909.

At the time of the first election of 1910, Balfour remarked of Scotland, that: 'I have no doubt whatever that there is a genuine and strong feeling against what they call the hereditary principles. It is the sort of doctrinaire point which appeals to the less educated among my countrymen',⁽¹⁶⁾. The Glasgow Herald put it clearly:

The elections in Scotland have up to the present time been influenced by the House of Lords question out of all proportion to its importance. The widespread hostility to the upper house may be partly traced to popular annoyance at the judgement of the law lords against the United Free Church.⁽¹⁷⁾

Blackwood's Magazine took the same view, arguing that 'the elections being fought on the old issues, resurrected much of the old Liberalism of the eighties; Scottish Liberalism is one of the most stubborn and feudal forms of Conservatism that we know. It is loyalty partly to a tradition and partly to a man, for the spirit of Mr Gladstone still walks on Scottish soil and the echoes of Midlothian have not died away',⁽¹⁸⁾. Chamberlain did not believe it possible to sell the idea of a non-elected House of Lords to Scotland,⁽¹⁹⁾ and the Scotsman's survey of Unionist candidates after the election found that:

They all say that the principal cause of our defeat was animosity to the Lords as hereditary legislators, some adding that the feeling was embittered by dislike of them as landlords and they all say there is no chance of changing the verdict as long as the issue remains the same. ⁽²⁰⁾

16 Balfour to Salisbury, February 4, 1910. Cited in Blewitt, op.cit., p.411.

17 Ibid.

18 Blackwood's Magazine, March 1910.

19 A Chamberlain, op.cit., p.220.

20 Ibid., p.206.

As Balfour concluded:

Lords and landlords used as practically synonymous terms had been their great difficulty. Reform of the House of Lords and a definite programme of land reform both in rural and urban districts were their chief desiderata.
(21)

By 1912, the Conservatives and the Liberal Unionists had merged to form the Scottish Unionist Association. In Scotland there was a separate agreement after Austen Chamberlain had recognised 'we could not bind the Scottish organisations in any way ... the case of Scotland must be separately treated and the Scotsmen must settle it for themselves',⁽²²⁾. Nevertheless the Liberal Unionists had displayed a zeal in 1910 for candidatures that was only rivalled by their lack of success. In January 1910 there had been nineteen interventions and in December, fifteen. But only in two constituencies in January and in three in December had the Liberal Unionists recorded victories. Yet despite the poor support for Liberal Unionist candidates, modern Conservatism was being established in Scotland. Thus Urwin can write of the years before the first world war:

The years witness... the transformation of the Scottish Conservatives from an impotent minority group into a political party with a great mass following and with a new interest in politics manifest amongst its adherents.⁽²³⁾

There was in fact little sign also in Scotland that the Liberals were pursuing the new progressive policies that P F Clarke has identified for Lancashire⁽²⁴⁾. Rather there seemed to be a sense

21 Ibid., p.240.

22 Ibid., p.418.

23 D Urwin, Scottish Historical Review, 44, 1965, p.94.

24 P F Clarke, Lancashire and the New Liberalism, (Cambridge, 1971).

that with improved organisation, membership and finance the Liberals could maintain their wide ranging support. In 1912 for example the retiring Scottish Liberal Associations Chairman claimed that: 'the organisation was never better than it is today. Whatever happens in the immediate future I have no doubt the Scottish Liberal Association will be fully equal to the demands made upon it',⁽²⁵⁾. But the Liberals did find themselves under pressure organisationally in the two years before the war. They were concerned about constituency organisation in the by-elections they faced, agreeing that some local associations needed to be overhauled⁽²⁶⁾ and in some cases restarted⁽²⁷⁾. Finance also continued to be a major problem⁽²⁸⁾.

Yet the policy matters that concerned Liberals most in Scotland were the traditional concerns of classical Liberalism. For example, the party's general council of 1912 concentrated its attention on debating home rule, land reform, votes for women (as well as proportional representation) and free trade⁽²⁹⁾. An examination of Executive Minutes in the two years before the outbreak of war reveals that the only major discussions on social reform concerned the local workings of education and poor law acts

25 Scottish Liberal Association General Council, November 29-30, 1912.

26 Scottish Liberal Association, Organisation Committee, November 20, 1913, March 19, 1914.

27 Scottish Liberal Association, Eastern Finance Committee, December 18, 1913. The Eastern Committee found in 1913 that 'one of the greatest difficulties they had to contend against of present was the scarcity of names of gentlemen who might be asked to contribute'. In February 1914, as a general election was felt to be imminent, the Eastern Finance Committee asked for an extra grant from party funds 'to enable the Association's Finances to be put on a sound basis'.

28 Ibid., February 26, 1914.

29 Scottish Liberal Association General Council, November 29-30, 1912.

and the opposition of fishermen to the new national insurance legislation, which Liberals felt might lose the party votes⁽³⁰⁾. But even on the traditional issues the party in Scotland was not prepared to go as far as the radical pressure groups wanted them to. On the women's issue, the party regretted the tactics of the suffragettes⁽³¹⁾ and refused to send any representative on a deputation to the Prime Minister organised by the Glasgow and West of Scotland Association for Women's Suffrage⁽³²⁾. While the party supported land reform, it refused to endorse the taxation proposals of the 'land values' group of Liberal MP's⁽³³⁾ and their main concern was the creating of smallholdings, endorsing minor amendments to the 1911 Scottish legislation⁽³⁴⁾. When the Land Nationalisation Society approached the party for support and assistance, this was ruled out of order because 'the society's objects were not in accordance with the views of the Association'⁽³⁵⁾.

In the 1910 General Election, the threat of Labour in Scotland could be easily swept aside. In South Ayrshire, for example, where the party had stood in 1906 also, the Labour vote fell from 20.8% to

30 Ibid., June 10, 1913.

31 Ibid., November 29, 30, 1912. Later, in 1914 when the Glasgow Branch of the National Union of Women Suffrage Societies organised a procession in Glasgow, the Executive resolved only to leave attendance 'to individual members of the Executive', Scottish Liberal Association, Executive, June 3, 1914.

32 Scottish Liberal Association, Organising Committee, January 21, 1914.

33 Scottish Liberal Association, General Council, November 29, 30, 1912.

34 Scottish Liberal Association, Organising Committee, May 21, 1914. For example, the party's land committee was concerned that 'many farm servants did not know how to obtain a holding'.

35 Scottish Liberal Association, Executive, May 13, 1913.

12.9% of votes, and in Camlachie, where Labour stood in the election of 1906 and the two elections of 1910, the Labour vote slumped from 30% in 1906 to 28.9% in January and only 18.1% in December. Labour's January performance was so dismal in fact that it did not stand in December in four seats contested in January.

Nevertheless in the by-elections of the period from 1910 the Liberals appeared to be in some difficulty, as Labour intervened in almost every by-election after 1912. In three of five by-elections contested on a three party basis, the Unionists pushed Liberals into second place. Two of these seats, Midlothian and Leith, had been Liberal strongholds, without a break from 1885. The Liberals themselves put their defeat down to poor organisation⁽³⁶⁾. In other three by-election contests where Labour did not intervene, the swing against Liberalism was just under 5%. Kinnear has calculated that if the swing from the Liberals had been repeated in a general election, the Unionists stood to gain between fifteen and twenty Scottish seats at a future general election⁽³⁷⁾.

The Liberals were themselves sufficiently worried in 1913 to plan a conference for organisers under the theme 'How best to meet the propaganda of the Unionist and Labour Parties'⁽³⁸⁾. But by-elections and elections were different affairs and although Liberals were doing badly nothing could be certain. Clarke suggests partly on the basis of the North East Lanarkshire by-election in 1911 where Labour fell back on its performance in the previous by-elections of 1901 and 1904 (although it improved on its showing in January 1910), that in two party contests where there was an arrangement between Liberals and Labour, Liberalism could hold its own⁽³⁹⁾. But in Scotland the chance of pacts was becoming increasingly unlikely.

36 Scottish Liberal Association Organising Committee, April 9, 1914.

37 M Kinnear, The British Voter, p.34.

38 Scottish Liberal Association, Executive, September 18, 1913.

39 P F Clarke, 'The Electoral Impact of the Liberal and Labour Parties, 1910-1913,' English Historical Review, 91, (1975), p.832.

II THE WEAKNESS OF LABOUR

Prior to 1914, Scottish Labour formed one of the weakest sections of the British Labour Party, despite its zeal for promoting candidates at Parliamentary elections. As the 1910 report of the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party remarked, 'the political organisation of Scotland is not as good as it might be....the steady and persistent work of the local Labour Parties is not as marked as in England'⁽¹⁾. While a Scottish Workers Parliamentary Election Committee had been initiated in 1899, before the creation of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900, and while the miners of Scotland supported Labour representation from the 1880s onwards, (well before the British miners' decision to affiliate to the Labour Party in 1909), Scottish Labour did surprisingly badly at elections⁽²⁾. It was the Scottish Independent Labour Party that was the most powerful political force in Scotland. It claimed fifty branches in 1906 and far more by 1910⁽³⁾. The Scottish Advisory Council of the Labour Party was only formed in 1913 - the result of national dissatisfaction with Labour's Scottish organisation - and it appointed a full time organiser Ben Shaw⁽⁴⁾. But by 1914 Labour's electoral achievement was confined to three Parliamentary victories, all under special circumstances, and despite Labour's policy of independence from Liberalism in Scotland, the successes were more of a tribute to

- 1 Labour National Executive memorandum on 'Scotland', April 13, 1910. Cited in R McKibbin, op.cit., p.91.
- 2 A brief study of the Scottish Workers Parliamentary Election Committee is included in F Bealey, Labour and Politics 1900-1906, (London, 1958). For an examination of the Scottish Miners, see R Gregory, The Miners and British Politics, (Oxford, 1968).
- 3 For a fuller study of ILP organisation see R Dowse, Left in the Centre, (London, 1966), pp12-19.
- 4 For the basic history of the Scottish Advisory Council - normally called the Scottish Council - See R McKibbin op.cit., pp39-43.

radicalism than to socialism. George Barnes won Blackfriars, later renamed Gorbals, in a three party contest in 1906, with Irish support, and held it in 1910, but only after the Liberal Party dropped out⁽⁵⁾. He was of course to be the only victorious Coalition Labour candidate in 1918. Alexander Wilkie was supported by the Jute Workers Union in Dundee but he benefited from Dundee's two member constituency and the transferable vote system that operated there. As the historian of the Labour movement in Dundee has suggested, 'his election was a confirmation of Dundee's Liberalism rather than a challenge to it'. Wilkie did not outpace Churchill: indeed in 1910 he recommended the second vote to him⁽⁶⁾. The only Labour victory against Liberalism in 1910 was in fact William Adamson's win in December 1910 in West Fife. But in this case, no Conservative stood and the result suggested that Labour was victorious because of a switch of substantial votes from Conservative to Labour between January and December 1910⁽⁷⁾.

But if Labour's parliamentary aspirations were frustrated by the existing political parties, Labour was by 1914 making considerable progress in local elections. While there was a long history of working class representation in local bodies in Scotland, it was from 1906-7 onwards that Labour candidates stood on a specific Labour platform, as nominees of a party, mainly under the auspices of the Independent Labour Party. By 1914 Labour had two hundred local representatives in Scotland on parish councils, town and county councils, and school boards⁽⁸⁾. In some areas, such as Leith, Bothwell and Wemyss, the party controlled a third of parish council seats before the war. In Carmichael in 1913, the party

5 A fuller study of the Blackfriars election is contained in D Rollo, Comparative Aspects of Irish Politics in Boston, New York and Glasgow, Edinburgh University, B.Litt. 1971.

6 W Walker, 'Dundee's Disenchantment with Churchill', Scottish Historical Review, 49, 1970, p.91.

7 Viscount Elibank the Liberal Whip believed that Labour votes were gained from the Conservative and Liberal Unionist Parties, rather than Liberals. Elibank Papers, 1910.

8 Forward, November 13, 1921. 36

took control and in Cambuslang, with eight of seventeen seats, it was near to power⁽⁹⁾. But while Labour was also making gains in the cities - winning five additional council seats in Glasgow in 1913 for example to make a representation of eighteen - the party was firmly established only as an additional force in local politics, not as a governing party. It was not surprising therefore that in his Socialism in Scotland Haddow described the years, 1906-1912, as 'a struggle with adversity'⁽¹⁰⁾ and that a future Labour Secretary of State of Scotland, Tom Johnston, wrote after an unsuccessful by-election campaign in 1911:

Labour and socialists have a sharp reminder that the cause for which they fight will not be achieved without an amount of propaganda and organisation work...there is a huge jungle of prejudice and inertia and ignorance to be cleared away. (11)

A study of Lanarkshire provides the best illustrations of the problems Labour faced before 1914. Nowhere had Labour attempted with more vigour to break the strength of Liberalism as in Lanarkshire, from as early in 1888 when Keir Hardie stood in the Mid-Lanark by-election. Indeed nowhere did Labour place so many candidatures before 1914. Labour stood in four by-elections after 1900 - North East Lanark in 1901, 1904 and 1911 and South Lanark in 1913 and in general elections Labour fielded three candidates in Lanarkshire out of its seven in Scotland in 1906, three out of nine in 1910 (January) and one out of five in 1910 (December), as well as placing candidatures in local elections. What made Lanarkshire apparently fertile ground for socialists was the financial support from the Lanarkshire miners union, which had joined the Scottish Workers Parliamentary Election Committee, and which grew from less than three thousand members in 1896 to thirty thousand in 1900 and

9 Forward, May 2, 1914; May 23, 1914.

10 W Haddow, Socialism in Scotland (Glasgow n.d.).

11 Forward, March 18, 1911.

forty thousand by 1914. With leaders such as William Small and Robert Smillie, the miners union's key officials from the eighteen eighties onwards were socialists. Yet William Stewart, one of the Independent Labour Party's organisers, was to write in 1905, 'I don't know what to say about Lanarkshire. There are only five ILP branches in all in Lanarkshire and there ought to be fifty-five. I very much believe that there are more socialists in Lanarkshire than the whole of the rest of Scotland but somehow they have never managed to get themselves thoroughly organised'. He added however that once organised 'they will make a clean sweep of the Liberal and Tory representatives from the end to end of the shire',⁽¹²⁾. Although there were only five branches in 1905, there were fifteen ILP branches by the end of 1906 after the appointment of the only full-time ILP organiser in Scotland and the formation of the Lanarkshire Socialist Federation during 1905⁽¹³⁾. In 1906 Stewart was to write that 'the change seems nothing short of a miracle',⁽¹⁴⁾. With the onset of unemployment in 1907 and 1908, Labour optimism grew even stronger.

By 1909 Labour were confident enough to risk fighting three parliamentary seats, yet 1910 brought four defeats - three in January and one in December. In fact in North-East and North-West Lanark the vote almost halved between 1906 and 1910⁽¹⁵⁾.

12 Labour Leader, January 6, 1905. For a fuller discussion of Lanarkshire Labour Politics, see G Brown, The Development of the Labour Party in North Lanarkshire, 1885-1914, Edinburgh University Undergraduate Dissertation, Economic History Department, 1972.

13 Labour Leader, June 30, 1905.

14 Ibid., July 6, 1906.

15 Forward, January 1, 1910.

TABLE 1.1

VOTES CAST FOR LABOUR IN LANARKSHIRE 1901-1911

	NE	NW	MID
1901	2900		
1904	2984		
1906	4658	3291	758
1910	2160	1718	3864
1910			3847
1911	2876		

(1) Independent Labour - not endorsed by Miners or ILP.

Source: F Craig, British Parliamentary Election Results 1885-1918 (Glasgow, 1969).

An indication of the difficulties confronting local Labour activists during Parliamentary contests at this time can be gauged from the records of the one local ILP branch that survives - Shettleston and Tollcross (part of Lanarkshire before 1918). When the neighbouring Camlachie Labour Representation Committee approached the branch for help in the contest in December 1910, the branch was more interested in their county council contest where their candidate was John Wheatley. The minutes record that Shettleston and Tollcross ILP 'agreed to write stating that owing to local elections our hands were full at present but immediately after we would ask our members for help'⁽¹⁶⁾. Local branches could not cope with electoral demands given that, in terms of membership, the pre-war period was merely one of quiet undramatic progress. Shettleston ILP was formed in 1905, charging 6d subscription every

16 . Shettleston and Tollcross ILP, November 24, 1910.

month and organising fortnightly meetings⁽¹⁷⁾. During the first year the branch had enrolled fifty-eight members although it had only retained thirty by the end of the year. In its second year it enrolled one more, fifty-nine, and retained thirty-nine⁽¹⁸⁾. A Socialist Sunday School was formed, and in 1910 they bought their own hall. They were, the minutes recorded proudly, 'the only political party in the district who had a hall they could call their own'⁽¹⁹⁾. By the outbreak of war, they had added another 25 members after reducing their subscription to one shilling a year and were considering the appointment of professional canvassers⁽²⁰⁾.

The official explanation of the slow progress of Labour before 1914 tended to be that the Irish issue distracted attention and prevented any quicker advance. When the party's assistant secretary J S Middleton addressed the Scottish Labour conference in 1931, he propounded this view: 'Until Home rule was granted they could not attract to the Labour Party the large Irish vote throughout the country'⁽²¹⁾. Lanarkshire is a good test case of the 'Irish' effect - proportionately Lanarkshire had the biggest concentration of Irish voters in Scotland, although by the turn of the century Macaffrey is probably right to suggest that, with only half the Irish community born outside Scotland, it was now a settled community in Scotland. Estimates of the importance of the Irish vote differ.

17 Shettleston and Tollcross ILP Branch, August 21, 1905.

18 Ibid., August 29, 1906.

19 Ibid., March 31, 1910.

20 Ibid., October 29, 1910.

21 Labour Party, Scottish Conference, Report, 1931, p.34.

According to Macaffrey's research, based on one area of Glasgow, only half of those Irishmen who were qualified to vote as householders were able to vote because of the large turnover in tenancies, the rating levels and the receipt of poor relief⁽²²⁾.

Estimates of other observers of the Lanarkshire and Scottish political scene in the period suggest that the Irish vote was not all that large or well organised. In Lanarkshire's three most working-class constituencies, it was less than one fifth of all electorate, not less than two thirds of which were working-class.

TABLE 1.2
ESTIMATES OF IRISH VOTE IN LANARKSHIRE

	Electorate	Irish Vote	Irish %	Working Class %
Mid-Lanark 1810	17,803	c3,000	15	72
North East				
Lanark 1901	16,894	c3,000	17	71
1910	22,554	c3,000	14	73
North West				
Lanark 1906	16,814	c3,000	17	67
1910	20,274	c3,000	15	69

Source: Labour Leader, September 7, 1901; Labour Leader, July 6, 1906; Forward, January 22, 1910; Glasgow Herald, December 6, 1910. Also Census Information.

In Scottish politics, moreover, the tactics of the United Irish League were not consistent and it did not always support Liberalism. In certain cases the League urged support for Labour against what it considered to be unsympathetic Liberal candidates.

22 Macaffrey, The Irish vote..., loc.cit., pp.30-37.

This happened in the 1901 North East Lanarkshire by-election⁽²³⁾ and in the North East and North West constituencies in 1906⁽²⁴⁾. In 1901 the United Irish League gave what was to be their defence throughout that they 'do not ask at elections as to whether a candidate is a Liberal or a Tory or a Labour man. They ask which man is sounder on the Irish question and that man they recommend to the electors',⁽²⁵⁾. What happened in Lanarkshire raises questions about the general impact of the Irish vote. While the United Irish League were to support Barnes when he won in Gorbals in 1906, they did not support Wilkie who was to win in Dundee, and their support was insufficient to win North West Lanarkshire, Camlachie and Paisley for Labour. In 1918, United Irish League support for most Labour candidates in the West of Scotland was in itself insufficient to bring the party victory⁽²⁶⁾. Generally it seems that their influence helped Liberals in marginal fights with the Conservatives (in 1906 the Scotsman argued that there were fifteen seats where the Catholic votes held the balance between the two traditional parties)⁽²⁷⁾, but it is doubtful if they were as crucial to holding back independent Labour as has been suggested. While Wheatley's Catholic Socialist Society was denounced, Wheatley argued that 'it is the custom if not a rule for the priest to take no part in politics',⁽²⁸⁾ and Paton wrote of Lanarkshire at this time⁽²⁹⁾

23 Labour Leader, September 14, 1901.

24 D Rollo, op.cit., p.192.

25 Labour Leader, September 14, 1901.

26 D Rollo, op.cit., p.193.

27 M Tobin, The Irish Question and the Emergence and Development of the Labour Party, Strathclyde University MSc., (1980), p.192. For a full discussion of the 1918 result see below, pp98-100.

28 Socialist Review, February 1909.

29 J Paton, Proletarian Pilgrimage, (London, 1936), p.186-7.

On one occasion when I was talking to one of our members a simple unlettered Irish labourer in Lanarkshire I asked him about the attitude of the local priest. He assured me he gave no trouble...They just let him understand he said, that we bowed to him in the church in all things spiritual and in matters temporal we are permitted to think for ourselves.

The real problem was the failure of Labour to capture the working class vote as a whole. There can be no doubt that the Labour Party suffered from the apparent radicalism of local Liberal candidates and the fact that the traditional issues of 'classical Liberalism' remained at the centre of the political stage. For example, in the first decade of the century Lanarkshire boasted Liberal MPs such as Findlay, Whitehouse and Douglas - as well as Cunningham-Grahame - who supported radical measures of social reform⁽³⁰⁾. But, as we have suggested, perhaps it was more important to their success that the key issues remained those of constitutional reform, free trade and land. After the January election of 1910, the agent for William Small, Labour candidate in North West Lanarkshire, concluded, 'possibly Labour could not have completed the contest under less favourable conditions...Scottish electors are against the House of Lords and protection... (and) are determined to win'⁽³¹⁾.

30 Findlay, Liberal candidate and later MP in North East Lanark, from 1904 was a temperance radical who had, he said, risen 'from the bottom of the ladder with iron burning in his soul at the ill-division of wealth... there was not a man or boy... but had as good an opportunity for rising to the highest position... What was required was character, energy and ability'. He supported old age pensions, land settlement, a graduated income tax, the municipilisation of water and gas (Glasgow Herald, January 22, 1906). In North West Lanark, Douglas and in North East Lanark, Whitehouse, were described as 'vigorous social reformers'. (Glasgow Herald, December 6, 8 and 8, 1910).

31 Forward, January 29, 1910.

The Liberals were not so certain of their hold on a county like Lanarkshire as to renounce attempts at an agreement with Labour. While Liberals and Labour made no agreements in Scotland to fight jointly (as Scotland was specifically excluded from any arrangements made), there were attempts locally at co-operation. In 1901, for example, at the time of the North East Lanarkshire by-election, Viscount Elibank - a Liberal Whip - favoured Liberal support for Smillie in preference to a Liberal Imperialist, Harmsworth. Indeed it seems that two radical Liberal candidates were prepared to leave the field clear for Smillie. But no arrangement became possible⁽³²⁾. In 1904 the Scottish Liberal Association set up a conciliation committee to examine where disputes with Labour might be avoided, but with little success⁽³³⁾. In 1906 the three Lanarkshire Liberal MPs were opposed by Labour candidates. It seems, however, that before the 1910 elections a more sustained effort to make an electoral pact was contemplated. It was suggested that the Liberals might stand down in one constituency (North West Lanarkshire) in return for a free run in another (North East Lanarkshire). An alternative suggestion was that Smillie move his candidature from Mid-Lanark to North East Lanarkshire where he would be given a clear run. As Small's agent recalled: 'The Liberals were almost on their knees to get us to withdraw Small'. But Smillie and the rest of the Labour Party were unprepared to compromise⁽³⁴⁾. 'We can make no negotiations with you', they said, 'If you really want to avoid splitting votes shift your Mid-Lanark Liberal into North East Lanark'⁽³⁵⁾.

32 Labour Leader, August 31, September 7, 1901.

33 Scottish Liberal Association, Executive Minutes, March 30, 1904 and June 29, 1905. Cited in Gregory op.cit., p.91. The Committee had not met by June 1905.

34 Forward, January 22, 1910, January 1, 1910.

35 Forward, November 25, 1909.

In Scotland Labour pursued a deliberate strategy of full independence from the Liberals and while before 1914 it hindered any Labour attempts to gain parliamentary representation, it clearly distinguished Labour for the longer run as a distinctive political force. Some writers have suggested that if the franchise had been available to those who were technically entitled to vote, and if the franchise had been extended before 1914, Labour would have been in a strong position prior to the outbreak of war⁽³⁶⁾. It is unlikely that such changes would have made a substantial difference, given Labour's failure to win substantial support amongst those working class voters who were able to vote. But there is equally little doubt that the Labour Party was establishing itself as a third force in Scottish politics, particularly in the years 1912 and 1913. For a generation, many areas had been influenced by socialist propaganda and when Labour performed well in the 1913 South Lanark by-election in a seat that was a mixed community of rural workers and miners, Robert Smillie wrote that it showed the effect of more than twenty years of socialist activity during which he had personally stood in seven election or by-election campaigns:

Ten years ago it would have been an impossibility. At that time the miners in the division would not have listened to their officials speaking Labour politics. They believed that trade unions had no right to interfere in politics and generally they supported the Liberal Party. Since then, the trade union decision, the minimum wage bill, the interference of the military and civilian oppression have opened up their eyes to the fact that the Liberal Party is as much the party of capitalism as the Tory Party. Therefore it is not surprising that hundreds of miners whom I have found to be Liberals a few years ago have now thrown up Liberalism for good and have openly aligned themselves with the Labour Party.

36 See for example McKibbin, op.cit., pp72-87 and Matthew, McKibbin and Kay, op.cit., p.796.

The latter (Liberalism) was a tradition with them but in Labour they have hope... with these men are the youths. These are surely with us and their allegiance is an indication of our inevitable success.(37)

The period between the election of 1910 and the outbreak of war in 1914 did strengthen the forces of Labour. First there was a growth in trade union membership that was unrivalled in comparison with previous periods. In 1892 after the first wave of 'new unionism' in Scotland there had been only 147,000 trade unionists in Scotland, two thirds of whom were in Glasgow. Less than one in five of manual workers were in trade unions and two thirds of Scottish trade unionists were in engineering and shipbuilding, mining and construction. While trade union membership declined drastically in the last years of the nineteenth century, it grew quickly again after 1906, and especially after 1910. By 1911 the STUC's membership was twice that of 1898, with 140,000 affiliated members, and by 1914 the miners had fifty thousand members, the dock labourers 7,000 and the ironmoulders and steel workers more than eight thousand. Glasgow Trades Council itself in 1914 had more than 70,000 affiliated members and Edinburgh Trades Council 15,000. In addition a shop assistants union, a farm servants union and a workers union (whose Scottish membership rose from 250 in 1911 to 9,000 in 1914) had been formed⁽³⁸⁾. The period saw major strikes amongst dockers, transport workers and miners (with the Scottish miners independently pursuing strike action for a 'four day week' as war was declared). Although a strike at Singers in Clydebank raised questions of industrial control over the workplace, Scotland did not experience the same level of

37 Forward, March 29, 1913.

38 Hyman, The Workers Union, (London, 1971), p.88. For a further discussion of trade unionism, see W M Marwick, A short History of Labour in Scotland. (London, 1967).

syndicalism or militancy that existed elsewhere. The Glasgow Trades Council was to state in its report for the years 1912-1914 that 'the number of disputes locally have not been so many or quite so long,' a reminder that Scotland's skilled unions remained the most prominent and least likely in this period to engage in precipitate strike action⁽³⁹⁾. But the experience of growing trade union organisation in Scotland provoked, as McKibbin stressed in his discussion of Britain as a whole, 'issues which tended to draw all working class organisations together... and fostered a sense of class consciousness'⁽⁴⁰⁾.

Trade union support for Labour was stimulated by the Trade Union Act, finally passed in 1913, which allowed for the creation of political funds. And from a low level of political organisation in 1910 at the general elections, Scotland was experiencing also an improvement in its Labour Party machinery. After 1913, a Scottish Advisory Council of the Labour Party with Ben Shaw as secretary co-ordinated local activities, and was the successor of both the disbanded Scottish Workers' Parliamentary Election League and the alliances that had brought forward candidates in the 1910 elections, but it did not convene a full conference until 1916. There were few Fabian Societies in Scotland before 1914. As W H Marwick states they 'existed sporadically', and while both the Social Democratic Federation and the Socialist Labour Party were active, especially in Glasgow⁽⁴¹⁾, it was the Independent Labour Party that was to prosper in strength, due not least to the powerful propaganda of the Forward newspaper, formed by ILP members in 1906 and profitable after 1911⁽⁴²⁾ with sales approaching

39 Glasgow Trades Council, Report, 1912, 14p. Cited in J Smith, op.cit., p.409.

40 McKibbin, op.cit., p.33.

41 For a fuller discussion see J Smith, op.cit., p.405-420.

42 Forward, August 31, 1956.

20,000⁽⁴³⁾. It had a motto, 'We shun sectarianism as we shun smallpox',⁽⁴⁴⁾ and allowed members of varying factions space in its columns. But its writers were primarily supporters of the ILP, and despite the ILP's divisions over Labour Party affiliation it advocated Parliamentary and Municipal electioneering.

But while organisation was being improved, and there is evidence we have cited for improvement in membership, the war is a dividing line in Scottish politics. First, the social impact of the loss of lives at the front must not be underestimated, particularly since it has been estimated that 100,000 Scots, 20% of British losses, died fighting⁽⁴⁵⁾. Second, the war increased unionisation to a level that had not been previously seen in Scotland. It had reached half a million by 1918. Third, the war brought social advances that stimulated Labour to argue for more social reform. As Winter has argued, semi-skilled and unskilled workers improved their positions; welfare and sanitation provisions were extended; allowances were given to soldiers' wives; rationing helped a proper distribution of goods; and health care improved. Of course, as he also suggests: 'It is only because urban poverty was so widespread before 1914 that we can claim that the war occasioned in general a relative and for many an absolute advance over pre-war standards',⁽⁴⁶⁾.

43 Sales figures estimated from Forward reports. Cited in W Campbell, The Origins and Early Development of Forward Newspaper: An Assessment of its Impact on Labour Politics in Glasgow, 1906-1914, Edinburgh University Undergraduate Disseration, 1972, p.21.

44 Forward, No. 1, October 13, 1906. For example, in 1910, Forward carried a long debate on attitudes to the Labour Party between John McLean and John Wheatley.

45 C Harvie, op.cit., p.24.

46 J Winter, 'A Note on the Reconstruction of the Labour Party,' loc.cit., p.66.

Finally, in Scotland the war occasioned a new level of militancy amongst sections of organised labour. While Scots were amongst the most enthusiastic of war recruits in the early months (one in five miners had joined by February 1915 and one in four after a year of war),⁽⁴⁷⁾ with voluntary recruitment proportionally higher in Scotland than in England, the war also brought the socialists of the ILP, and other parties, into prominence. During the war Labour was to be helped by the adverse response to forms of industrial and military conscription, by the growing support for a negotiated peace rather than 'a fight to the finish', and by the impact of the Russian Revolution. The Russian Revolution put socialism on the agenda in a practical way that no other event did. It allowed pacifists of the left to link with those who now supported 'peace by negotiation' in a practical alliance that became identified with the Labour Party and while in the long run it created divisions within the socialist camp, it made in 1917 the organisation of a socialist party almost inevitable.

The wartime events on Clydeside, which was to house one quarter of a million war workers, contributed to the development of the left-wing of the Labour movement. In the engineers' unrest of 1915, which led to the suppression of Forward, the howling down of Lloyd George, and the deportation of strike leaders, the issue was not so much anti-war feeling as the problem of 'diluting' skilled work. Hinton has written of the 'narrow craft outlook of engineers in 1915-16' and shown that the unrest was limited in its scope, extending little beyond the engineering workshops, only a dozen of which were controlled by the militant Clyde Workers Committee, and missing almost entirely the shipbuilding yards and marine engineering workshops. It was, he points out, the Socialist Labour Party Leaders - Muir, McManus, Messer and Bell - and not the pacifist John Maclean or the Glasgow ILP leaders who directed events⁽⁴⁸⁾. Maclean's anti-war stance placed him outside the ambit

47 R P Arnot, A History of the Scottish Miners, (London, 1955), p.142.

48 J Hinton, The First Shop Stewards, (London, 1973), p.140-161.

of the Clyde Workers Committee. With the failure of strike action we see, according to Hinton, 'the progressive isolation of the militant vanguard in the munitions factories...the principal explanation of the failure of the shop steward movement to develop a political offensive against the war lies not in the consciousness of its leaders but in the consciousness of its rank and file' ⁽⁴⁹⁾.

The war strikes of 1915 and 1916 undoubtedly aroused resentment especially after imprisonment of the strike leaders, and other agitators like Maclean and Maxton. But the Independent Labour Party always remained at a distance from the industrial unrest. It drew its members from the craftsmen, the small traders, the schoolteachers and white collar workers (rather than from the engineers and more characteristic industrial workers), who played a prominent part in the wartime rent strikes, and it was really these that brought together the industrial and political wings of the Labour Movement. The rent strikes of the war were Scottish wide and not simply confined to Glasgow. They did not involve slum dwellers so much as the more substantial elements in the working class, skilled workers in the shipyards, and engineers together with their eminently respectable wives ⁽⁵⁰⁾. Their success which forced the Government to appoint a departmental enquiry and eventually led to the Rent Restriction Act, was to boost the strength of the Independent Labour Party. Between 1915 and 1917 ILP membership in Glasgow for example doubled ⁽⁵¹⁾.

49 Ibid. While Hinton's final conclusions are disputed by, for example, I Maclean, his discussion of the strike leadership in 1915 is not.

50 J Melling, Scottish Labour History Society Journal 13. (1979), pp.39-45. See also McHugh's contribution in Journal, 12, (1978), pp.36-40 and Melling again in Journal No. 15 (1981) p.4-15.

51 Forward, April 12, 1917.

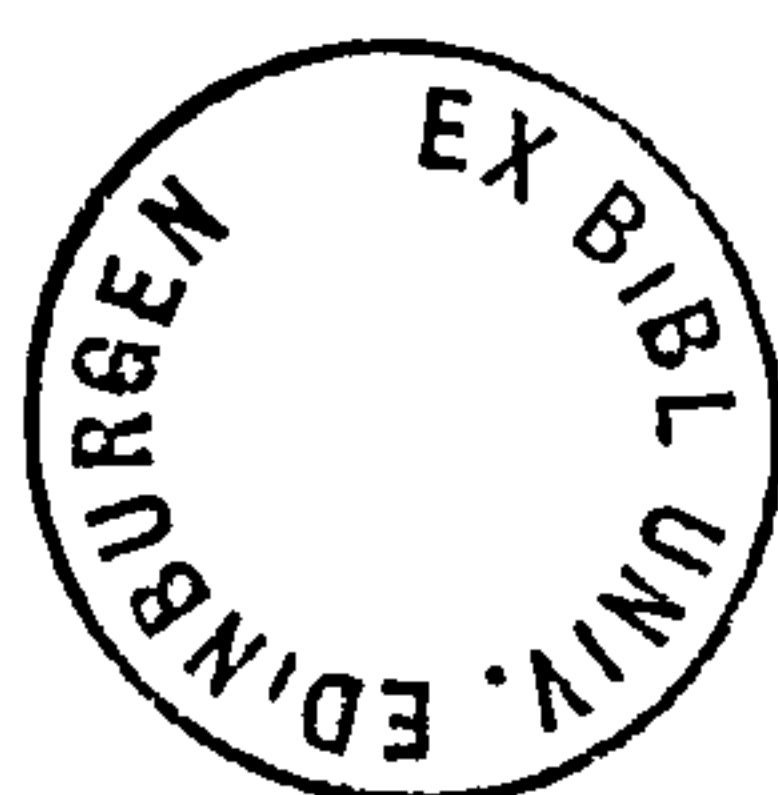
The rent strike linked industrial and political action, where the 'dilution' strikes had failed. But if the revolutionary leaders of war-time militancy on the Clyde were progressively isolated, what they did achieve was to develop a new form of industrial and political organisation which opposed the equation of socialism with state control and was to be important as a theoretical basis for the Communist Party. The growth of the shop stewards movement itself led Gallagher and others to advocate a form of syndicalism in a series of pamphlets, not least the publication 'Direct Action' in 1919⁽⁵²⁾.

When the Commissioners on Industrial Unrest took evidence in Scotland in 1917 and 1918 they found that 'unrest was not as great as earlier in the war,' although there remained a 'revolutionary element'. The main grievances they found centred on housing, where they detected 'a striking revelation of the acute need in industrial centres', and on profiteering which people felt contributed to the rising costs of living⁽⁵³⁾. However with compulsory conscription and with the growth of a 'peace by negotiation' movement, which linked itself to the small pacifist group that already exists in Scotland, there was a growing support for the left. In January 1918, when the Government threatened the conscription of skilled munitions workers, a strike on the Clyde to force an end to the war was only narrowly averted⁽⁵⁴⁾.

52 Hinton, op.cit., where the story of the industrial militancy on the Clyde is traced in detail.

53 Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest, Scotland, 1917, Parliamentary Papers Vol.XV, 1917-18, p.3.

54 Hinton, op.cit., p.255-264. As Hinton writes the Government's new manpower bill threatened the conscription of skilled munitions and 'united industrial unrest with the anti-war movement'.



The anti-war movement was not confined to Glasgow, as a commentator in Scottish Review confirmed:

The strength of the hostility to militarism in Scotland may be gathered from the fact that the War Party is a discredited minority in nearly all the Trades and Labour Councils north of the Tweed. Only in Aberdeen and Edinburgh has it been possible to secure a bare majority in favour of the Labour Party in the Westminster Parliament... in all the other Trades Councils so far as I have been able to find out the feeling is strongly antimilitarist and even pacifist.(55)

That there was still considerable support for the war in areas such as Aberdeen was revealed by the discussions which preceded the Aberdeen South by-election of April 1917. When Francis Johnson, the ILP National Secretary, asked Joseph Duncan, Secretary of the Scottish Farm Servants Union, to consider standing as a candidate, Duncan wrote in reply:

A peace by Negotiations fight would be an absolute leap in the dark. There is no UDC nor does the Council for Civil Liberties mean anything else than the ILP. The Trades Council is evenly divided and if a candidate were put up the Council could not be got to support him. It might support the Government candidate, the President and quite a number of delegates certainly would. Except for the ILP there is no body in the city which would support such a candidate. None of the churches would give any aid and I could not place my hand on any electors who would sign nomination papers except those in the ILP or in close touch with it. It would be practically impossible to get an election committee of any size together as again we should have to depend on the ILP. (56)

55 Scottish Review, Spring 1917. The miners for example were for peace. James Macdougall wrote that: 'at the huge gathering held at Hamilton, and elsewhere, solemn declarations of opposition to the continuance of the war were carried with absolute unanimity'. The Miners ballot in Lanarkshire on peace negotiations recorded a vote of 18,767 for immediate peace negotiations and 8,249 for the continuance of the war. (James Macdougall, 'The Scottish Coalminer,' The Nineteenth Century and After, December 1927, p.769).

56 Joseph Duncan to Francis Johnson, February 28, 1917. Francis Johnson Correspondence 1917/44/1.

The reason was, he said, that there was little or no munitions work and even shipyards had been denuded of workers who had gone to war. Aberdeen had, he concluded, been 'cleaned out of workers' as industries had 'shrunk'⁽⁵⁷⁾. Thus, while the ILP were still keen to place a peace candidate in the field, a visit by the Scottish organiser William Stewart led him to conclude it would 'not be wise to put forward an ILP candidate, the chief reason being that most of the Labour voters are away from Aberdeen, and that any votes secured would give an inadequate expression of the real feeling of the constituency on the questions at issue'⁽⁵⁸⁾. Stewart's conclusion was right. When the Union of Democratic Control insisted on placing Pethick-Lawrence as a 'Peace by Negotiation' candidate, he received only 333 votes - 6.5% of the poll.

The Russian Revolution was the final catalyst for the socialist movement. While in the long run its impact was to divide the left in Britain into deeply entrenched factions, the first revolution was inspirational to socialists, leaving, for example, James Maxton 'dumbfounded... it was what all socialists told us should take place... but it had come sooner than we had expected'. Forward almost at once detected an upturn in support for the left due to events in Russia⁽⁵⁹⁾.

The general shift to the left between 1915 and 1918 was reflected in the mood of the newly constituted Scottish Advisory Council of the Labour Party when it first met formally in 1916. The 1916 Conference opposed compulsory conscription, with only six of the three hundred delegates present appearing to have any reservations.

57 Joseph Duncan to Francis Johnson, March 5, 1917, Francis Johnson Correspondence.

58 William Stewart to Francis Johnson, March 8, 1917, Francis Johnson Correspondence.

59 Forward, July 14, 1917. A full discussion of the impact of the Russian Revolution is contained in A Nassibian, Attitudes on Clydeside towards the Russian Revolution 1917-1924. Strathclyde University, M.Litt. 1977.

The Conference then went on to vote for the opening of peace negotiations. On the domestic front, the Conference supported a right to work bill 'which shall have for its object the legalising of a working day with a maximum of eight hours', which should be implemented 'in view of the disorganised state in which the Labour market will be after the war'⁽⁶⁰⁾. The Party also went on to express opposition to government policies on housing - the issue which as the report stated 'has largely engaged our attention' - but the Labour Party was precluded by its new constitution from affiliating to the new Scottish National Association on Housing⁽⁶¹⁾. The Executive wanted a distinctive Scottish programme which concentrated on three issues - communal ownership of land, housebuilding for the working classes, and free education - although the national party precluded them from publishing any statement during the war⁽⁶²⁾.

Nor was the socialist radicalism of the Labour Party in Scotland confined to social - or indeed domestic - issues. At an Industrial Conference in March 1917 which was called under the auspices of the joint Labour Party - Trade Union Committee, 'Conference representing 35,000 Scottish workers congratulates the Soviet people on having overthrown the Czarism and sincerely hopes they will be able to establish the freedom of the people'. And at the same conference a mild motion from the platform concerning military service was beaten down by the ILP amendment moved by Maxton which stated: 'This Conference is of the opinion that no form of compulsory industrial service will be acceptable to workers of the country'. In 1917, the Party's own conference was to oppose both conscription and the war, and to demand the separation of the Parliamentary Labour Party from the coalition⁽⁶³⁾.

60 Labour Party Scottish Council, Report of Conference, 1916, p.43.

61 Labour Party Scottish Council, Report of Executive, 1916, p.7-8.

62 Ibid., p.8-9.

63 Scottish Council, Report of Annual Conference, 1917, p.43. See also Report of Industrial Conference, March 21, 1917.

It was no surprise that the Labour Party nationally was worried by the turn of events in Scotland. In April 1917, Shaw, the Scottish Secretary, reported to Middleton at national office:

No leaflet issued north of the Tweed would find acceptance among the more activist Labour politicians which did not say something in violation of either the truce or the coalition or both ... Unless it contained an attack upon the policy of the party at headquarters not to mention its personalities it would be looked upon with suspicion.

He also expressed his worries about the proliferation of left wing splinter groups in Scotland:

It is a little aggravating to find so many organisations cropping up and appealing to our clientele and more or less overlapping ours. It cannot be helped meantime ... when challenged those persons point to the fact that the Labour Party has no programme.(64)

The Glasgow ILP made their own attempts at drawing up such a programme. In November, 1917 a 'Special Emergency Parliamentary Committee' drew up proposals for a manifesto for which they hoped to gain workshop support. Rejecting 'patchwork reforms' the ILP's minimum programme contained five demands: full nationalisation of industry, workers control, restoration of the land to the people, rehousing with interest-free rents, and free education for all. The ILP debated the programme at a meeting in November⁽⁶⁵⁾. Emmanuel Shinwell and William Stewart moved against the original draft for control of work shops by the workers with an amendment favouring 'ownership and control by the state or community', and eventually another amendment was accepted favouring 'control of the workshop by the workers subject to the will of the community as expressed in their national councils' ⁽⁶⁶⁾.

64 Shaw to Middleton, April 3, 1917, NEC correspondence/Labour Party.

65 ILP Glasgow Federation Minutes, November 30, 1917.

66 Ibid.

Organisationally however the Labour Party remained extremely weak during the war years and was unable to benefit fully from the increased unionisation of workers. The setting up of a Scottish Advisory Council had been demanded since the disappearance of the Scottish Worker's Election Parliamentary Committee and the Scottish Labour Party when trades councils and constituency parties affiliated directly to the National Labour Conference. But from 1912, when Arthur Henderson had held conferences in the major cities to discuss organisation, no agreement could be reached on the composition of the conference and its executive. In 1913 the miners' in particular had objected to insufficient trade union representation on the proposed Council and in 1914 Glasgow Labour Party had called for increases in its delegation⁽⁶⁷⁾. It was not until 1915 that an inaugural conference could meet and set up an executive. But while it was constituted to improve organisation it had few affiliated members. At the first full conference of the Scottish Council in 1916, the Labour Party's national chairman, George Wardle said:

The fact that they were having a separate conference, he hoped, meant that they intended to remedy what was really the disparity between the number of seats in Scotland and the number of seats held by Labour in the neighbouring part of the island. He hoped that the conference would organise the political Labour movement in Scotland to lead in the matter of seats as well as in the matter of men. (68)

In fact by 1917 there were only twelve trades and Labour councils or local representation committees affiliated to the conference; outside Glasgow, only from the Aberdeen, Ayrshire South and Ayrshire North constituencies. Labour strength rested mainly on the affiliation of one quarter of a million unionists. But unions such as the engineers, were not affiliated, and the miners' with

67 The detailed problems are set out in McKibbin, *op.cit.*, p.91 onwards.

68 Labour Party, Scottish Council Conference Report, 1916, p.26.

90,000 affiliated members monopolised one third of the votes at the conference. The next biggest affiliated unions were the General Workers (19,000), the Workers Union (18,000), the Boilermakers (17,000) and the National Amalgamated Union of Labour (12,000). Only half of Scottish trade unionists were affiliated.

The miners' numerical strength was complemented by their initiative in persuading trade unions to involve themselves in politics. A conference of principal officials of trade unions in the west of Scotland was held under the auspices of the miners' executive and the Scottish Executive of the Labour Party in 1917 to ⁽⁶⁹⁾ secure the creation of Labour representation committees or local trades and labour councils. The resolutions which were carried include a call that 'trade unions should take concerted action and should join all LRCs and Trades Councils and assist in forming others when required'. Trade unions were urged to finance branches to enable them to join local constituency associations after it was agreed that 'a much more general sustained and determined effort is required on the part of these unions who are politically in earnest... only negligence is responsible for the lack of proper allocation of the political funds of a trade union', ⁽⁷⁰⁾.

There was no sign however, that Labour was preparing for any major breakthrough in Scotland at the post-war election. The correspondence of this period between Shaw, the Scottish Secretary, and J S Middleton at Transport House reveals that constituencies were hardly in a healthy state of organisation as the war ended. This was true in both the counties and the cities. When a constituency party was to be formed in East Lothian where 'those in the movement seem to be wanting a Parliamentary' candidate rather keenly' (as Shaw told Middleton in March 1917) ⁽⁷¹⁾,

69 Ibid., Conference Report, 1917, p.10-11.

70 Ibid.

71 Shaw to Middleton, March 16, 1917, NEC, Middleton, Shaw correspondence.

Middleton replied:

I am afraid some of our people in some of the Scottish counties do not realise the tremendous difficulty that a Labour candidate in a country constituency presents and my own feeling is that new candidates in very new areas, as far as we are concerned, should not be encouraged at the moment... certainly until there is adequate organisation and some sort of show in the way of Labour representation locally there should be no thought of propaganda parliamentary contests. In these districts I think there is all to be said for consolidating our position and having our plans laid with a view to bringing into the movement as many men coming home from the front as we can possibly secure. (72)

Glasgow - the radical area for anti-war activity - is a touchstone of the organisational problems facing Labour. Before 1914, there had been a variety of attempts to form Labour Representation Committees, culminating in a meeting of 1911 which agreed to replace the Municipal Workers Committee (which ran candidates at local elections) by a Central Labour Party' to unify and control all election work in the district' (73). By 1912, when Ben Shaw was appointed as first organising secretary, the Party was already in trouble, since the Social Democratic Federation had withdrawn, and the Trades Council had refused to pay affiliation fees (74). After three years of war, there were only two Labour representation committees in existence (in the Govan and College divisions), and Arthur Henderson complained that Glasgow's Labour Party had 'totally failed to meet the requirements of so large an area.' In reviewing the constituency organisation in 1917, Shaw wrote that College LRC was 'moribund' and even Govan LRC which had selected a candidate in 1916, was 'unable to pay more than the ordinary

72 Middleton Shaw correspondence, March 21, 1917, NEC Correspondence, Labour Party Reports.

73 Minutes of Conference to form Central Labour Party, May 18, 1911.

74 Glasgow Labour Party Minutes, March 21, 1912.

expenses of the LRC⁽⁷⁵⁾. When delegates met to form the new Glasgow Trades and Labour Council at meetings in April and June 1918, there were ninety-three trade union branches and eleven ILP branches represented but still only two constituency Labour representation committees⁽⁷⁶⁾.

In Glasgow the political ineffectiveness of local representation committees allowed the Independent Labour Party to be in the driving seat. When the National Executive and the Scottish Executive discussed Glasgow in 1916, they had suggested that at a future election only Rollox, Govan and Bridgeton divisions should be fought in addition to the Labour seat of Gorbals⁽⁷⁷⁾. However at a meeting in November 1917 of socialist groupings in Glasgow, co-ordinated by the ILP, it was reported that 'The ILP had already decided to fight every possible constituency'⁽⁷⁸⁾. An election committee and fighting fund had been set up after Shettleston ILP had proposed in October 1917 that the ILP 'be called upon to take immediate and energetic action to provide funds to fight six Glasgow seats with ILP candidates (Bridgeton, Govan, Springburn, Camlachie or Shettleston, Gorbals or Tradeson, and St Rollox or Maryhill)',⁽⁷⁹⁾. Their special committee had recognised that £3,000 was required for election finance and had recommended that ten constituencies in Glasgow be contested. But when its report was discussed, two additional recommendations - to fight only five or all fifteen seats - were also proposed. After a vote the party decided it would contest fifteen⁽⁸⁰⁾.

75 Shaw to Middleton, March 16, 1917. op.cit.

76 Glasgow Trades and Labour Council, Minutes, June 19, 1918.

77 Labour Party Scottish Council, Report of Executive, 1916, p.10.

78 Glasgow ILP Executive, Minutes, February 22, 1918.

79 Ibid., October 26, 1917.

80 Glasgow ILP Federation, Minutes, November 30, 1917.

By March 1918 candidates had been endorsed for Bridgeton, Shettleston and Govan (where the previously adopted candidate had dropped out)⁽⁸¹⁾. But no nominations came from Central, Gorbals, Tradeston, Cathcart and Pollok and, as financial difficulties embarrassed the ILP, a limit of six seats was set. Their election committee recommended that because fund raising had not been successful 'no Parliamentary nominations be endorsed in addition to the six candidates already decided upon until a sum of £1,200 is in the central parliamentary fund'⁽⁸²⁾. Their financial scheme of 1917 was 'non-existent'⁽⁸³⁾. Some finance came from the ILP nationally,⁽⁸⁴⁾ but the ILP recognised that even to fight six constituencies involved a minimum sum of £2,000⁽⁸⁵⁾, and it was only agreed to allow Hillhead ILP to adopt a candidate as long as the Federation in Glasgow had no financial responsibility⁽⁸⁶⁾. Despite the enthusiasm of the Glasgow ILP, there was insufficient financial backing to make their dreams of fighting every seat a reality.

Within the trade union movement, the principal driving force was the miners' union - itself a federation of six main divisions in Scotland, which had their own constitutions, rules, finances, and procedures. In 1906 five of Labour's Scottish candidates were miners. By the end of the 1918 election campaign, the miners' had over thirty years spent £23,000 in fighting twenty five parliamentary contests⁽⁸⁷⁾. The Scottish miners were the principal

81 Ibid., March 29, 1918.

82 Glasgow ILP Executive Minutes, May 31, 1918.

83 Ibid., May 24, 1918.

84 Ibid., July 26, 1918.

85 Ibid., October 16, 1918.

86 Ibid.

87 The Miners and their Political Campaigns, Forward, November 15, 1919.

trade union force in the Labour Party's Scottish Advisory Council and they developed a system of financing their own organisers in Scottish seats. In 1918 they placed candidates in eight constituencies, even in areas where there was no divisional Labour Party or any other Labour organisation. One example was the Peebles and South Midlothian constituency where they formed a divisional Labour Party in 1919 only after they had sponsored a candidate at the 1918 General Election⁽⁸⁸⁾.

We have already seen how in Lanarkshire the miners' unions made much of the running for independent Labour representation. In Ayrshire the miners were the driving force also. By 1918 almost all the county's 19,000 miners were unionised. But it was in combination with the local Independent Labour Party and under the umbrella of the Ayrshire Trades Council that Labour representation was fostered. Trevis has shown how, under the influence of Maxton and Maclean, the Ayrshire ILP became more left wing as the First World War progressed,⁽⁸⁹⁾ and after a joint meeting of the Independent Labour Party's Ayrshire Federation and the Ayrshire Trades Council it was agreed in December 1917 to fight four Ayrshire constituencies⁽⁹⁰⁾. Nevertheless in Ayrshire the miners and ILP caused resentment as they divided the four seats between them. In the two predominantly mining seats of South and North Ayrshire, two miners - the President of the Scottish miners, James Brown, and the President of the Ayrshire miners, Robert Smith - were selected, both with the support of, and the latter on the nomination of, the ILP. In the other two seats, ILP nominees were chosen in preference to an Engineer, Robert Climie, later Kilmarnock's Labour MP., and a former local councillor. In both cases the miners joined with the ILP to press the ILP's case⁽⁹¹⁾.

88 See below.

89 A Trevis, The Development of the Labour Movement in Ayrshire, 1914-1926, p.147-9. Strathclyde University, M.Litt., 1980.

90 Ibid., p.152.

91 Ibid., p.155-158.

By 1918 in fact the miners were employing four full time agents as political organisers⁽⁹²⁾. Lanarkshire, Ayrshire and the Lothians were the principal areas of political activity by the miners organisations. In West Fife, the political organisation was also run by the miners, but in the rest of the county where miners were not so politically active there was scarcely any coherent organisations at all.

Over the rest of the country, where there were no miners or ILP branches, local organisation if it existed at all, usually rested with trades councils or more likely individual trade unions. In Dundee, for example, the motive force behind Labour representation was the Jute Workers Union, which claimed 20,000 union members in a city which had a population of only 170,000. As the local jute worker's organiser, John Sime, was to claim in 1919, his union 'has been the backbone of the LRC in fees for some years'⁽⁹³⁾.

92 Forward, November 15, 1919, in article 'Scottish Miners and their Political Campaigns'.

93 W Walker, Juteopolis, op.cit., p.394.

III LABOUR'S CAMPAIGN IN 1918

Clearly the Labour Party were not fully prepared for an election as early as December 1918. First, the party had been divided on the issue of war. Second, socialists in Scotland had concentrated much of their energies in industrial activities with Forward having continually to remind its readers of the importance of political work. Third, the party's new constitution was not yet fully established, with many divisional Labour Parties only properly constituted after the election. Membership of the Labour Party and constituency organisations was increasing rapidly, however, during 1918. While figures for the Labour Party's individual membership were not collected until 1928, one useful measure of increasing activity was the growth in the Independent Labour Party during 1918. In February 1917, Forward estimated the ILP had only 112 branches in Scotland with an estimated 3,000 members. By March 1918 there were 167 branches with an estimated 10,000 members⁽¹⁾. Perhaps that was an overestimate because the ILP's own figures suggest that the number of branches rose to 184 in June 1918 and to 192 by September, with fully paid up membership rising from 4,336 to 7,232, and membership lists rising from 5,656 to 8,904. However, whatever figures are taken, by September 1918 in fact the Scottish ILP had the largest membership of any ILP region in Britain. In Glasgow it was estimated that there were twenty-seven branches with 2,000 members (Bridgeton being the largest with 250) and in Lanarkshire there were fifty branches with around 1,000 members in all. Between them Glasgow and Lanarkshire had nearly one half of fully paid up members⁽²⁾. In the East, organisation was still patchy, but Edinburgh Central was one of the biggest branches with two hundred members⁽³⁾.

1 Forward, March 9, 1918.

2 This information comes from A Marwick: Thesis on the Independent Labour Party. (Oxford University, B.Litt., 1964).

3 Edinburgh Central ILP, Minutes, February 28, 1919. There were up to 60 regular attenders.

There were few Labour candidates adopted by the time the election was declared. Even ten days before nominations closed, there were no Labour candidates decided in eleven constituencies in which Labour eventually stood⁽⁴⁾. In three other constituencies, Galloway, Perth and Moray and Nairn, when Labour challenges were expected they failed to materialise. In two constituencies, Leith and Glasgow Central, the chosen candidates dropped out, with only Leith managing to adopt a last minute replacement. In Clackmannan and East Stirling, the expected Labour intervention was replaced by a Co-operative candidature.

In some case there were major disputes over who candidates should be, which had not all been resolved by the time of the election. John Maclean's Labour candidature for the Gorbals was only the most publicised of local feuds. As a British Socialist Party nominee who was at the time of the election in prison, Maclean's selection was initially refused endorsement by the Labour Party's National Executive Committee, although he had support within the Scottish Executive of the Party. In Aberdeen North, Frank Rose, the eventual winner of the seat, was not officially recognised as a Labour Party candidate although there was no other Labour challenger. In Dunfermline Burghs there was a disagreement over who in fact the official Labour candidate was. Ponsonby, the sitting MP claimed that he was the Labour nominee, but so too did William Watson, a miners' nominee who had been entered by the miners after the coalition government challenged William Adamson in West Fife. It was left to the National Executive to resolve that there was no official Labour candidate in Dunfermline although

4 Scotsman, November 25, 1918. The constituencies were Ayr, Dundee, Dunfermline, Camlachie, Kelvingrove, St Rollox, Montrose, Kilmarnock, South Midlothian and East Renfrew and South Aberdeen.

Ponsonby joined the Labour Party. In Greenock the official Labour candidate, Shaw, was opposed by, as Forward put it, 'a freak Labour candidate', who was an Irish Nationalist⁽⁵⁾.

In the two-member constituency of Dundee when the National Executive Committee called for a ballot of constituency members on whether to fight one or two seats, they found varying views which included support for the Prohibitionist Scrymgeour (who had a Dundee Workers' Committee in support of his candidature). But eventually recognition was given to the sitting member Wilkie, who was supported by the Jute and Flax Workers, and James Brown, a Trades Council member⁽⁶⁾. In Aberdeen where the ILP opposed contesting the Aberdeen North seat, the Amalgamated Society of Engineers had taken matters into their own hands and adopted Frank Rose, a Journalist, whose nomination was too late for Labour Party National Executive endorsement⁽⁷⁾.

Roxburgh and Selkirk constituency was typical of the difficulties Labour faced in finding candidates and an organisational machine. A Labour Party branch was formed in Hawick only in November 1918,⁽⁸⁾ two weeks before a candidate was selected for the Roxburgh and Selkirk Constituency⁽⁹⁾. The Divisional Labour Party

5 While there are references to the disputes in both Forward, the Glasgow Herald and Scotsman reports of the campaign, the differences are summarised in Labour Party Scottish Council, Executive Report, 1919.

6 W Walker, Juteopolis, op.cit., pp.448-450.

7 C Phipps, The Aberdeen Town Council and Politics 1900-1939: The Development of a Local Labour Party in Aberdeen, University of Aberdeen, M.Litt., 1980, p.136. Rose eventually agreed to accept Labour Party policy and became a member of the Parliamentary Labour Party.

8 Hawick Labour Party, November 7, 1918.

9 November 23, 1918.

was only brought into being after meetings in January and February 1919⁽¹⁰⁾. In the event electoral organisation consisted simply of purchasing some national pamphlets, hiring a hall for meetings and urging the candidate to visit the maximum number of electors⁽¹¹⁾.

In spite of this in 1918 it was possible to secure a unity of Labour forces that did not recur afterwards. Not only were socialists like Maclean and Macdougall accepted as candidates but the Labour Party's campaign also managed to involve the Highland Land Leage and the Scottish Co-operative Committee. The Highland Land League had been formed in 1909, and despite the warnings of Scottish Farm Servants' Union, the Scottish Advisory Council of the Labour Party had accepted that they were representative of Scottish rural opinion. The League claimed that in a poll of 5220 to nil, it had voted for electoral arrangements with the Labour Party and that it shared with Labour a joint programme for land nationalisation⁽¹²⁾. This agreement was to break down almost immediately after the election. A second was to survive, although it was the source of many difficulties in the twenties. The decision of the Scottish Co-operative Committee to form a Central Co-operative Parliamentary Committee was made in 1917, prior to similar decisions by the Co-operative movement for the rest of Britain. Indeed the Scottish Co-operators sought great autonomy from the British organisation and Labour's Scottish Secretary, Ben Shaw, predicted that 'the Co-operative Movement in Scotland will rapidly drift into politics'. While the demands for Scottish autonomy were frustrated by the British Conference of April 1918 there were to be three Co-operative candidates at the General Election in Scotland⁽¹³⁾.

10 Ibid., January 28, 1919 and February 18, 1919.

11 Ibid., November 23, 1918. The party wrote to Labour Party Secretary Arthur Henderson 'to secure a top rate speaker'.

12 Labour Party Scottish Council, Executive Report, 1919. See also Scottish Review, Autumn 1918, p.321.

13 Shaw to Middleton, Labour Party Archives, Transport House LP/SC/14/285 as cited in M Keating and D Bleiman, Labour and Scottish Nationalism, (London, 1979) p.76-77.

But while alliances within the left were possible, financial problems prevented a fuller slate of candidates. On December 2, the Scottish Executive were advised by headquarters of 'the impracticability of endorsing further candidatures', after it was realised that 40 had been fully adopted in addition to four Highland League and three Co-operative candidates, and that three other candidates were being suggested⁽¹⁴⁾.

In the end there were fifty-two Labour candidates, but only forty-one were officially adopted Labour nominees. Four were Highland Land League candidates who stood with the support of Labour, other three were unofficial Labour candidates, and in four other constituencies - Glasgow Central, Kelvingrove, Tradeston and Dunfermline - candidates, as was later stated, 'ran with the benison of the local Labour Party organisations only - their candidatures being of the eleventh hour'⁽¹⁵⁾. Of the officially adopted candidates three were Co-operative candidates, two were British Socialist Party ones (Maclean and Macdougall), and most of the rest were ILP members. In Glasgow seven of the twelve candidates came from the ILP (in addition to the two from BSP). The Glasgow Herald commented that this situation with nine socialists out of twelve candidates was 'an injustice to trade unionists'⁽¹⁶⁾.

Problems only began with the selection of candidates. Finance was really the key obstacle. In reporting that red flags were being sold to raise election funds, Forward stated that: 'the campaign is being handicapped for lack of funds.' Later there was an even more desperate editorial claim that several constituencies would go by

14 Labour Party Minutes of Scottish Executive Committee, December 2, 1918.

15 Labour Party Scottish Council, Executive Report, 1919, p.1.

16 Glasgow Herald, November 29, 1918.

default simply for lack of money⁽¹⁷⁾. The Scottish Divisional Council of the ILP also complained about their inadequate funding. They received only £1,000 from the national headquarters for all of Scotland for the election, of which £850 only could be distributed in time. In Glasgow the ILP Executive complained that only £350 could be made available in all, from various sources for each candidate, and they drew the National Administrative Council's attention to 'the inadequacy of the grants to Glasgow candidate'⁽¹⁸⁾.

The Labour Party in Scotland fought under a national programme which emphasised the importance of peace abroad and reconstruction at home. But it also issued a separate Scottish manifesto in association with the Highland Land League, which argued that the principal issues affecting Scotland were land nationalisation and the establishment of a Scottish Parliament. The manifesto also stood by large scale plans for nationalisation and for the introduction of a capital levy⁽¹⁹⁾. The Independent Labour Party in Scotland went further in its advocacy of left-wing policies. Their Scottish literature pushed to the fore the issues of nationalisation, the setting up of a national food department, the initiation of a housebuilding programme with continued rent control, and argued that these were 'the means to wrest political power from the present ruling class'⁽²⁰⁾. The rents issue was especially

17 Forward, November 16, 23, 1918.

18 Glasgow ILP Executive, November 15, 1918.

19 Labour Party Scottish Advisory Council, Appeal to the Scottish People, (Glasgow, 1918).

20 Independent Labour Party, Election Manifestoes, contained in papers of Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party.

emphasised, with the ILP claiming that 'a rent war would soon be raging in the country', after the expiry of the Rent Restriction Act⁽²¹⁾.

There were however, ideological disagreements among Labour candidates, and 1918 was the only election of the inter-war years where Labour candidates could include people like Maclean, who refused to take up his seat in Parliament, and others who were merely advanced Liberals. In Clackmannan and East Stirling the Co-operative candidate announced he was in support of Lloyd George's reforms, and in Inverness, the Labour candidate claimed 'he was the true representative of the principles of the Liberal Party.' In Roxburgh and Selkirk the decision to place a Labour candidate in the field had only been because of the view that the Liberal voice was not fully represented locally in the election. In West Fife Liberals such as Guillard, the Liberal Whip, believed Adamson was moderate enough to be supported by the Coalition⁽²²⁾. In North Aberdeen, Frank Rose infuriated local ILP members by arguing that Germany should be punished severely; that starving Germans be denied food; and that conscientious objectors should be denied the right to vote for five years⁽²³⁾. As a contrast, in addition to John Maclean, Macdougall - the other British Socialist Party candidate under Labour's banner - argued that voters should 'not be misled by attempts to reform capitalism', and in Motherwell, Newbold stated: 'my slogan is complete and unconditional surrender of capital and all power to the working class'⁽²⁴⁾.

21 Election Manifestoes. In St Rollox for example, leaflets said 'Your rent is to be doubled... vote for rent restriction at the ballot box'. There was they said, a 'mobilisation of the factors battalion (which) threatened attack on the home front.'

22 Glasgow Herald, November 21, 1918.

23 C Phipps, op.cit., p.138.

24 Election Manifestoes, 1918.

Nevertheless the Labour Party managed to retain a semblance of unity. Collection cards for the Labour Party were issued by the left-wing Clyde Workers' Committee⁽²⁵⁾. Indeed, while the Clyde Workers' Committee had originally planned to run their own candidates, it had been persuaded to leave the fight to the official parties⁽²⁶⁾. In 1918 the Labour Party label covered a multitude of policy positions.

25 Forward, November 9, 1918.

26 Forward, February 8, 1918.

IV THE COURSE OF THE ELECTION

The detailed course and tactics of the 1918 General Election Campaign await a comprehensive study. What is clear from our examination of Scotland is that the readiness to support the Coalition arose from the threat of Labour success amongst a newly enfranchised electorate. The Coalition Government's early thinking favoured going to the country during war-time. By September 1918 it was in favour of an early election and a coalition for peace-time, after Lloyd George had 'prophesised great unpopularity for the government during the period of demobilisation and said if we had an election in the spring we might get a Bolshevik Government'⁽¹⁾. The Labour threat in Scotland was a principal reason for the enthusiasm for 'coupon' arrangements in 1918 and the 'socialist menace' was an explicit theme of Coalition, and also Liberal, candidates throughout Scotland. Reconstruction issues were admittedly also to the forefront at the start of the campaign, and it was difficult for the Liberals of the Asquith wing to argue against the Coalition programme. But in Scotland at least the later stages of the campaign became dominated not only by the jingoism of the 'Hang the Kaiser' school - a war of words originating from Scotland - but more important also by warnings of the insidious effects of socialism. Amongst the more sophisticated newspapers, there was an attempt to distinguish between moderate and extreme wings of the Labour Party but others labelled even the most moderate elements of the Labour Party as 'Bolshevists'. Forward newspaper identified this changing mood in the campaign as early as the third week of November, arguing that: 'The lines of the campaign are already apparent. Everybody who does not agree with the capitalists is already a Bolshevik'⁽²⁾. At the end of the first week of December, the paper commented:

1 B Hall, 'Lloyd George's Timing of the 1918 Election,' Journal of British Studies, 14 (1974-75), p.121.

2 Forward, November 16, 1918.

The sole Coalition stunt has been Bolshevism which has been met in most cases by an effective counterblast, that Carson and Bonar Law are prime Bolshies. Nobody is worrying about Lloyd George and reconstruction. Everyone knows the election is a Tory ramp.- Labour versus Tory. That is the issue. (3)

It was the Coalition Government which made all the early running in the election. The announcement of the election was in Lloyd George's hands. The reconstruction programme was the first to be issued, and every candidate was faced with responding to that. The adoption of candidates had necessarily to be swiftly engineered and the Liberal associations were faced with the choice of supporting the Coalition candidate or readopting or adopting their own candidates. In fact only twelve Liberals, who were not already members of Parliament, were adopted by the Liberals. Most of these choices, it will be seen, were last minute responses to Coalition tactics, rather than representing any fundamental political or ideological differences, and some of the candidates came forward in seats where a Liberal member was retiring.

The desire to defeat Labour led to an early spate of Conservative endorsements for Coalition candidates. It has been said of Britain that it was 'only the fear of Labour and strong pressure from Central Office including the withdrawal of financial aid that kept the local parties in line'⁽⁴⁾. In fact in Scotland at a national and constituency level Coalition was enthusiastically embraced by the Conservative and Unionist Party. While Bonar Law urged Scottish Conservatives to give support 'to the candidate who in your honest opinion is likely to support the Government' in a speech in St Andrews Hall in Glasgow on 25 November,⁽⁵⁾ the

3 Ibid., December 7, 1918.

4 J Ramsden, The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, 1902-1940, (London, 1978), p.141.

5 Glasgow Herald, November 27, 1918.

Western Divisional Council of the Conservatives had already gone further, unanimously declaring that, 'this council welcomes the continuance of the Coalition during the period of reconstruction following the war, cordially approves of the policy outlined by Mr Lloyd George and Mr Bonar Law and urges upon Unionist electors in each constituency the importance of giving loyal and wholehearted assistance to those candidates who are recognised as supporters of the Coalition Government'⁽⁶⁾.

At a local level Coalition was no less enthusiastically embraced. In Gorbals it went as far as supporting the Coalition Labour candidate George Barnes and forcing the withdrawal of the Unionist candidate, Lovat Fraser⁽⁷⁾. As the Glasgow Unionist Association report declared, Unionists were: 'called upon to combat the pernicious doctrines of bolshevism as represented by Mr John McLean. After careful consideration and consultation with Mr Andrew Bonar Law and other leaders of our party it was decided we should support the candidature of Mr George Barnes'⁽⁸⁾. In Berwickshire and Haddington, the Unionist Council supported the Coalition Liberal, Hope, as 'the one most representative of what was best for the common weal'⁽⁹⁾. In Dundee, the Unionist Executive supported both the Liberal, Churchill, and the Labour MP, Wilkie⁽¹⁰⁾. Roxburgh and Selkirk Unionists agreed to give support to Munro, the Liberal Secretary for Scotland⁽¹¹⁾, and Ross and Cromarty Unionist Association unanimously supported the Liberal

6 Scottish Unionist Association, Western Divisional Council, November 9, 1918.

7 Scotsman, November 23, 1918.

8 Glasgow Unionist Association, 6th Annual Report, January 27, 1919.

9 Scotsman, November 21, 1918.

10 Ibid., November 25, 1918.

11 Ibid., November 21, 1918.

candidate, MacPherson, after he had been nominated by the Ross and Cromarty Liberal Association, despite the fact he had no coupon⁽¹²⁾. In Dumbarton the Unionist candidate dropped out after the Unionist Association gave support to the Coalitionist Taylor, who had been supported and named by the National Democratic Association also, and considered himself a Coalition Liberal with NDP support. In Partick the Unionists supported the Coalition Liberal⁽¹³⁾, as they did in Dunfermline⁽¹⁴⁾. In Dumfries, the Unionist Association first agreed to support the Independent Liberal, Dudgeon, and it was the Party Whips who asked it to put forward a Conservative candidate against Guiland⁽¹⁵⁾. In Bridgeton, although McCallum Scott, the Liberal, was seen as radical⁽¹⁶⁾, the Unionist, Hutchison, stood down in order to support him as a Coalition Liberal⁽¹⁷⁾. In these instances, it can be seen that far from being drawn into a Coalition ticket, Scottish Conservatives embraced Coalitionism enthusiastically and in some cases - Gorbals, Dumbarton, Ross and Cromarty, Dumfries and Dundee - were prepared to go beyond the lines laid down by the party managers. Indeed the Coalition Unionists on the ground went further to consider supporting Liberals outside the Coalition. In East Fife early on in the campaign a decision was taken by the Unionist Executive not to oppose Asquith. The Glasgow Herald reported on 22 November that the Unionists had 'resolved by a large majority not to provoke a contest in view of Asquith's support for the Coalition principle'⁽¹⁸⁾. (It was only after his Huddersfield

12 Ibid., November 22, 1918.

13 Glasgow Herald, November 28, 1918.

14 Ibid., November 20, 1918.

15 Ibid., November 18, 1918.

16 Ibid., December 13, 1918.

17 Glasgow Unionist Association, 6th Annual Report, January 27, 1919.

18 Glasgow Herald, November 22, 1918.

speech at the beginning of December that this mood changed). And in South Midlothian and Peebles, the Glasgow Herald reported on 25 November that the Unionist Association had agreed not to oppose Sir Donald MacLean⁽¹⁹⁾. Correspondence between MacLean and Sir Henry Dundas, of the Unionist Association, led to Dundas asking MacLean if: 'He was prepared to give whole hearted support to the proposed Coalition Minister and equally to Lloyd George'. Even when the reply stated that while full support would be given over peace and reconstruction, MacLean would never give an 'unqualified pledge' to any party because he did not consider himself a delegate to Parliament, Unionist support was still forthcoming⁽²⁰⁾.

There were areas of disagreement between Liberals and Unionists but many of these were quickly resolved. Originally the Perth Unionists had invited Skelton to be their candidate, but later by a majority the Unionist Association went back on this decision and agreed not to oppose the Liberal, Young, despite his programme for state housing, social welfare and state control of land⁽²¹⁾. The Galloway Unionists who had been expected to adopt their own candidate, in the shape of Colonel Baillie of Broughton and Cally, supported instead the Liberal MP for Kirkcudbrightshire. Here the circumstances were reversed since Galloway was a new seat uniting the previously separate Wigtownshire and Kirkcudbrightshire constituencies⁽²²⁾. In Argyll, the Unionist Association reluctantly agreed to the withdrawal of the MacLachlan of MacLachlan as Unionist candidate in favour of the sitting Liberal MP. The MacLachlan said he had accepted that Lloyd George, Bonar Law and George Barnes desired that 'the supporters of the coalition should not oppose each other'⁽²³⁾.

19 Ibid., November 25, 1918.

20 Scotsman, November 23, 1918.

21 Scotsman, November 25, 1918.

22 Ibid., November 18.

23 Ibid., November 20.

In Lanarkshire, the Rutherglen Unionist Association 'recorded a strong protest' against the Liberals selecting a candidate without consultation with the Unionist Association⁽²⁴⁾. But they eventually agreed to the decision. In East Aberdeenshire the Unionists intended at first to put forward their own candidate against the incumbent Liberal MP, Cowan, but in the end agreed to support the Coalition banner under his name⁽²⁵⁾. In North Aberdeen, the Liberal MP, Pirie, was eventually supported but only following questions by the Unionists about his support for the Coalition⁽²⁶⁾. After much rancour, Captain Radcliffe, the Coalition Unionist candidate withdrew in Central Edinburgh to allow a Coalition Liberal to fight Labour. In Inverness, there was repeated contact between the Unionists and the Liberal Coalitionist, Morrison (later Lord Morrison), since the Unionists were dissatisfied with his views. But the problems were overcome, not least because of the intervention of Bruce of the Highland League Party, who claimed that he was representative of Liberalism⁽²⁷⁾.

In all these areas the problems had not been insuperable. In very many instances Unionists had actively backed Liberal choices either unanimously or by a majority, despite in some cases the radical programmes being advocated by their choices. In others this positive enthusiasm had been absent but Unionists had fallen into line in face of the need for unity. The extreme instance, which tested Unionist acquiescence to the limit was Cathcart where Sir Alexander Shaw had been chosen as Unionist candidate. He had issued his manifesto before he received a telegram on 20 November that: 'the Prime Minister's Whips have claimed the right to run the

24 Scotsman, November 21, 1918.

25 Ibid., December 9, 1918.

26 Ibid., November 20, 1918.

27 Ibid., November 30, 1918.

recognised Coalition candidate in the Cathcart division'. On 22 November, the Cathcart Unionists protested against this decision which had been made without consulting the candidate or the Association within the constituency. They decided to adopt Shaw as representative of the Coalition and announced that they 'would rather lose the seat' than be represented by the Liberal Coalition candidate, Pratt. It was only pressure from Bonar Law that made Shaw withdraw. In a public letter on 4 December he stated that he withdrew 'in order to preserve the seat for the Coalition candidate',⁽²⁸⁾.

In a number of other seats the Unionists undoubtedly were keen to reach agreement with the Liberals, even though agreement escaped them. There was no real desire to have their own candidates and only peculiar local circumstances frustrated the desire for unity. This can be seen by looking at three particular constituencies - Forfarshire, Greenock and South Ayrshire (in which constituency a Labour victory eventually ensued). In Forfarshire, the Unionist Association asked the sitting member, Falconer, to support the Coalition and to repudiate his vote against the Government in the Maurice Debate. The Unionists' support for an arrangement came because as the Unionist President stated, 'there were rumours in the county of a Socialist and Labour candidate taking the field ... a threatened three cornered contest would almost certainly result in the return of the Socialist candidate',⁽²⁹⁾. But Falconer's reply was that he would support the Coalition's reconstruction programme while 'reserving the right of independent action with regard to particular measures when they were submitted to Parliament', and he argued that the responsibility rested on the Unionists 'if by putting forward a Unionist candidate your committee secure the transfer of a Liberal seat to the Socialist Party',⁽³⁰⁾. In the event the Unionist Executive in the constituency recommended Falconer's adoption but while Conservative

28 Glasgow Herald, December 4, 1918.

29 Scotsman, November 22, 1918.

30 Ibid.

Central Officer were prepared to add Falconer to their list of Liberal coupon candidates, the General Committee of Forfar Unionists were not sufficiently satisfied with his answers, and overturned their Executive's advice. Thus Captain Shaw was adopted as an official Coalition candidate⁽³¹⁾.

The position in Greenock proved even more difficult, as two Labour candidates claimed Labour endorsement and two right wing candidates claimed Coalition support. While Sir Godfrey Collins, the sitting Greenock Liberal member, claimed to support the Coalition, the Greenock Unionists initially found him unacceptable. When the Unionists adopted an alternative, Chapman, Collins argued that 'the London Tory Caucus had marked down the active Liberal members'. But it transpired that Collins' predicament was more the result of accident rather than design⁽³²⁾. In fact Sir George Younger was to write apologetically to Collins stating that he found Collins' rejection 'a painful political experience'. Younger explained that a certain portion of seats had been allocated to Coalition Liberals in Scotland, after they had prepared a list of those they desired to fight. He and Pratt on behalf of the Scottish Liberals had been negotiating on the basis of that list and 'Greenock was never asked then at all'. It was only, said Younger, 'at the final meeting', that demand for Greenock had been made, too late for Younger to do anything but secure neutrality in the contest⁽³³⁾. Thus Chapman, the Unionist candidate, declared himself to be 'the resolute Coalition candidate' and 'an out and out supporter of the Prime Minister', while Collins took the Coalition line also and on his return to Parliament supported the Coalition.

31 Glasgow Herald, November 23, 1918. Forfarshire was one of the six additional seats Younger recommended for Coalition Liberal endorsements.

32 Scotsman, November 25, 1918.

33 Glasgow Herald, November 26, 1918.

In South Ayrshire, the Liberal candidate was Robertson but he found himself faced by a Unionist, Brigadier Pollock McCall, and an Independent Conservative, Wallace. The quarrel was as much between these last two as between Liberal and Unionist; the choice of Pollock McCall, a local landowner, had been made in preference to Wallace who was a leading member of the Orange Order⁽³⁴⁾. Wallace who stood as an Independent deplored the failure of the Unionists to support the Liberal, Robertson, to prevent a Labour victory but when McCall offered to stand down if Wallace did so, there was no response. All these candidates supported the Coalition and it was in the end Wallace's determination to stand that was the main stumbling-block to unity⁽³⁵⁾.

On the Liberal side, however, there was just as much desire for agreement as there was on the Unionist side, despite the Liberals' resentment about the calling of an election and the use of the coupon. The Liberals felt an election was unnecessary, and they were particularly opposed to the coupon, but most of them were not against the Coalition. Under Liberal rules, it was strictly a matter for local constituencies who their candidates were to be, and many local Liberals were perfectly willing to support Conservatives to defeat Labour. The real problem was that there had been so many Liberal seats in Scotland before 1918 that no matter what the Unionists conceded, these concessions seemed insufficient. The granting of thirty coupons to Scottish Coalition Liberals had been a condition of Lloyd George's agreement for 150 Liberal Coalition candidates in Britain. Thirty coupons out of seventy four seats (including the University constituencies) seemed to Lloyd George a generous settlement, although the Coalition Liberal Whip, Guest, felt it inadequate⁽³⁶⁾.

34 A Trevis, *op.cit.*, p.161.

35 Glasgow Herald, December 11, 1918.

36 K Morgan, Consensus and Disunity, (London, 1979), p.33.

From the Unionist side Younger accepted Guest's view and suggested to him that he might have additional endorsements in six more seats. As he wrote to Bonar Law, 'I felt all along that in most of the constituencies... it would be far better to put up a Coalition Liberal than a Coalition Unionist',⁽³⁷⁾.

In any case the Liberals were partly unable to take advantage of these Conservative offers because of the weakness of their organisation, both nationally and locally. The Scottish Liberal Association was in a state of flux in 1918, on its way to being reorganised as the Scottish Liberal Federation. In October 1918, the retiring Office Bearers of the Scottish Liberal Association agreed that 'no objection would be taken to waiving their right of winding up the organisation in its present form as the organisations that had appointed them had practically ceased to exist',⁽³⁸⁾. The General Council had been unable to meet the previous month 'owing to the fact that none of the organisations had been properly reformed and delegates had not been appointed to the Executive of the General Council'. The National Secretary had called an executive meeting nevertheless, although the process of reorganisation was only half completed simply because of the probability of a general election⁽³⁹⁾.

The Liberals neither wanted nor were ready for election. The Executive Committee in September claimed that it was 'not demanded by public opinion and would imperil the unity of the country',⁽⁴⁰⁾.

37 Younger to Bonar Law, ABL, papers 95/4 cited in A Cuthbert, 'Lloyd George and Conservative Central Office', in A Taylor (ed.). Lloyd George : Twelve Essays. (London, 1971), p.176.

38 SLA Meetings of Office Bearers, October 2, 1918, 'to consider arrangements for membership of the General Council'.

39 SLA General Council, September, 1918.

40 Ibid.

PAGE

NUMBERING

AS ORIGINAL

In fact the general view among Liberals was that all Liberal candidates should be supported whether Coalitionist or otherwise. Thus the Glasgow Executive agreed that they would 'support all Liberal candidates in the Field'. This was in line with Asquith's earlier statement that he would not countenance the setting up of any Liberal candidate against any Liberal who has been adopted: 'Liberal against Liberal is to my mind suicide'. The Scotsman noted as the campaign began:

That the Liberals who look to Mr Asquith as their leader seemed to a large extent to be avoiding contests with Liberals who are also avowed supporters of the Coalition Government.

Only in Hamilton did it appear that Coalition and Asquithian Liberals would be opposed.

As the campaign developed, a surprising number of local Liberal Associations proved to support the Coalition outright, leading the Glasgow Herald to ask the Asquithian Whip Guillard to explain why 'about half the Scottish Liberal candidates ... refused to fight the election under his management'⁽⁴⁴⁾. This unkind jibe was very near the truth, since so many local associations looked to the Coalition rather than to him for leadership. The following local associations in fact declared without reservation for the Coalition : Inverness, Ross-shire, Coatbridge, Central Aberdeenshire, Bute and North Ayr, Kilmarnock, Clackmannan and East Stirling, Clackmannan and West Stirling, Dunfermline, Central Glasgow, West Renfrewshire, Galloway, Paisley, Shettleston, Lanark, Clydebank, Bothwell, Linlithgow, Partick, Perth and Kinross, Greenock and Kelvingrove⁽⁴⁵⁾. In Paisley for example the Liberal MP, McCallum, who had not been awarded a coupon was put under local pressure to

44 Glasgow Herald, December 1, 1918.

45 List compiled from examination of Glasgow Herald and Scotsman reports of November and December 1918.

stand as a Coalitionist. He decided to announce he was 'a whole-hearted supported of the Coalition' after his Liberal Association had shown 'a strongly expressed desire that he would support the Coalition without the qualification of Liberal' ⁽⁴⁶⁾.

In fact on the ground it seems Liberal Associations were prepared to support not only Liberal Coalitionists but in cases Coalition candidates who were Conservatives. In at least ten constituencies the local Liberal Associations offered to support the Unionist candidate usually on the grounds that the anti-socialist vote should not be spilt. The ten were : Clackmannan and East Stirling, Bothwell, Hamilton, Aberdeenshire Central, Linlithgow, Bute and North Ayr, Shettleston, Glasgow Central, North Midlothian and Peebles and Coatbridge ⁽⁴⁷⁾. In most of these constituencies there was no Liberal candidate in the field but in some seats the Liberal candidate withdrew. In North Midlothian it took the casting vote of the Chairman to decide that no steps should be taken to look for a candidate. In Bothwell, Linlithgow and Shettleston the Liberal withdrew ⁽⁴⁸⁾. In West Stirlingshire, while the Liberals originally forced Cunningham Graham to withdraw in favour of the Unionists, they reinstated him after the Unionists refused to place thier candidate before a joint selection conference ⁽⁴⁹⁾.

In fact just prior to the election the situation changed as the Liberals decided on last minute interventions. On 28 November, the Glasgow Herald claimed that 'within the last few days Liberal candidates have been rushed into every constituency where it is

46 Scotsman, November 21, 22, 1918.

47 List compiled from Scotsman and Glasgow Herald, November, December, 1918.

48 Ibid.

49 Scotsman, November 20, December 6, 1918.

thought that their interventions would bring the defeat of Coalition candidates ... Scotland provides numerous instances'. Indeed the paper claimed to detect 'a new movement initiated by Asquithian Liberals for an alliance with Labour'⁽⁵⁰⁾. In fact what was occurring was a hardening of Liberal opinions against the Coalition, expressed more clearly in Asquith's speech at Huddersfield at the end of November, when he described the government as 'a junta' which was proscribing Liberal members and which was in danger of backsliding on its pledges of reforms. The result was to disturb severely but not destroy Unionist and Liberal co-operation against Labour. In Glasgow in early November for example, it had been predicted that the two parties should share out the constituencies amicably, and the Conservative candidate for Kelvingrove expressed the widespread Unionist frustration when these 'unofficial though strenuous efforts to prevent any contests between Unionists and Liberals' broke down. He had no hesitation in saying that: 'an arrangement could have been come to by which all parties would have been satisfied and which in particular would have recognised the claims of sitting MPs to be returned to Parliament'⁽⁵¹⁾. On top of Asquith's remarks, the Unionist Association's reluctance to stand down in Cathcart, made relations between the two parties difficult. Thus early in December some new Liberal candidates were adopted by some constituencies although at the same time some Liberals who considered fighting other seats thought better of it. The local arrangements for pacts suffered a set-back but were not destroyed. Eventually the alliance between Unionists and Liberals was limited but still operated widely. It was the Liberals who suffered from the limitations which mainly they had imposed. In Glasgow five sitting Liberal MPs lost their seats in the election.

50 Glasgow Herald, November 28, 1918.

51 Ibid.

At the end of November Asquith claimed that too many Coalition candidates were Unionists and that the coupon had been unfair to the Liberals. It was Sir George Younger in particular who was charged with what later was called 'the Scottish grab' on the part of Unionists, but his reply was that 'only thirty-four candidates put forward by the Unionist organisations have achieved official recognition. There are three or four cases in which that official recognition has not been recorded. It does not seem to be much of an extreme number ... In Scotland alone fifteen candidates were asked either by me or by the local associations to stand down in the interests of the Liberal supporting the Coalition'⁽⁵²⁾. The Liberals had been unable to find candidates because of their own weakness and in the event there were not thirty but only twenty-eight couponed Liberals. Liberals could often only threaten ineffectively to put forward a candidate and the partial breakdown in the later stages of the campaign of the desire for agreement between the two parties created a vacuum which Conservatives came forward to fill. Events in Glasgow show this. The initial plan had been to put forward in the fifteen seats six Liberals and six Unionists with three Labour or NDP candidates, although a barrier in the way of its realisation was the personal unpopularity of some of the individual Liberal MPs. In the election only three Liberals had Coalition support and there were eleven Unionist candidates, with George Barnes a Coalition Labour candidate in the Gorbals. In addition, in East Fife the unofficial Conservative, who was determined to oppose Asquith, eventually received official backing.

The granting of thirty coupons to Scottish Coalition Liberals had been a condition of Lloyd George's agreement for 150 Liberal Coalition candidates. Thirty coupons in 74 seats seemed to Lloyd George a generous agreement, although Guest felt it inadequate⁽⁵³⁾.

52 Glasgow Herald, December 7, 1918.

53 K Morgan, op.cit., p.33.

Younger then suggested to the Coalition Liberal Whip that he might have additional endorsements if he chose to put up candidates in an extra set of Scottish seats : East Fife, East Edinburgh, Forfarshire, Paisley, South Midlothian and Peebles, all seats where it seemed to him far better to put up a Coalition Liberal than a Coalition Unionist⁽⁵⁴⁾.

In fact, after all this it was hard to distinguish the Independent Liberals from Coalition support. An examination of their election manifestoes suggests that there were amongst the Independents those who would support the Coalition unreservedly, those who would support the Coalition until the peace settlement was reached, those who would support the Coalition as long as it kept to its manifesto and legislated for 'reconstruction'. Many uncouponed Liberals called themselves Coalition candidates and the only objection many had to the Coalition was the tactic of issuing coupons. For example the Govan candidate, Holmes, claimed to be 'the true Coalition candidate'. The Kelvingrove candidate MacPherson found it his 'first duty to assist the Coalition government'. Erskine Hill in North Lanark was 'strongly in favour of a national and Coalition solution'. Sir William Robertson in South Ayr stated that 'adhesion to the Coalition Government did not involve any sacrifices whatever of the Liberal cause and principles'.

54 Younger vigorously denied what was called 'the Scottish Grab'; the general Unionist feeling was that in 'error', six extra seats were handed to the Liberals. R Blake, The Life and Times of Andrew Bonar Law, 1858-1923, (London, 1955), p.393.

In Kinross and West Perthshire, Gardiner called himself a 'Liberal Coalitionist' who 'whole-heartedly supported the programme outlined by the Premier'. In the Western Isles although he stood as 'an advanced Liberal' retaining his liberty of action and opposed a Liberal candidate, Coutts, who had been given the coupon, Murray promised whole-hearted support to the Government in solving the great international problems. Some, like Campbell, the Bute and North Ayr candidate, seized on Bonar Law's statement that support should be given to candidates who supported the Coalition to argue that 'pledged candidates claim no preference over Liberals but the reverse',⁽⁵⁵⁾.

Many Liberal candidates managed to support the Coalition while at the same time arguing for more radical measures of social reform. Only a few were aggressively anti-coalition. In West Edinburgh for example, Hogge would not side with Asquith or Lloyd George but insisted he was 'absolutely independent ... his political faith was Liberal' faith'. While supporting nationalisation, Cunningham Graham declared himself in East Stirlingshire a Liberal supporter of the coalition 'to try its hand with the solution of the great problems of reconstruction'. Even the Asquithian Liberal Chief Whip, Guillard, who was 'determined not to go back to the Commons with his hands tied', said 'he would support the Coalition Government in all Liberal measures conceived in the right spirit',⁽⁵⁶⁾.

With candidates in only half of the Scottish constituencies, the Liberal organisation on the ground was still poor. There was to be

55 Quotation extracted from Election Manifestoes, 1918.

56 Scotsman, November 22, 1918.

little help available from the Scottish Liberal headquarters. As early as 11 November, a circular from the Secretary of the Liberal's Eastern Executive had stress the 'necessity for agents getting their own literature, canvas cards and speakers secured locally',⁽⁵⁷⁾.

In all, apart from those with the coupon, there were thirty-five Liberal candidates, three of whom stood as Coalition Liberals without Conservative opposition and after their successful election supported the Coalition in Parliament. There was one independent Liberal in Hamilton who stood without the support of any organisation. Of the other thirty-one, twenty were in fact sitting Members of Parliament, and thus there were only eleven new candidatures from Liberals not MPs. In four constituencies Liberal fought Liberal - in Aberdeenshire and Kincardine East, Berwick and Haddington, Caithness and Sutherland, and the Western Isles.

At the poll, there were thirty-four Coalition Conservatives with coupons, twenty-eight Coalition Liberals, two from the National Democratic Party and one Coalition Labour candidate, Barnes. Their views were in fact not substantially different from those Liberals without the coupon. Morgan has suggested that 'the coupon election was not a story of jingo emotion at all : on the whole it was relatively quiet',⁽⁵⁸⁾. But in Scotland the story was somewhat different. Gideon Murray, who won the St Rollox seat as a Coalition candidate, was to put it rather differently :

57 SLA, Eastern Executive, November 11, 1918.

58 K Morgan, op.cit., p.41.

Any candidate who was not prepared to bring the Kaiser to justice ... and in favour of exacting the largest sums possible from the Germans ... had little chance of being returned to Parliament.(59)

And a tendency gradually become clear to equate anti-German feeling with anti-socialist emotion in a way that isolated Labour.

A sign of how the campaign disintegrated can be gleaned from the two election manifestoes issued by Taylor, the Coalition candidate in Dumbarton Burghs. His first manifesto of November stressed social reform. By December he issued a second manifesto to 'develop my policy in full owing to the fact that I have been deprived of the right of free speech at my public meetings'. In this he reiterated his support for progressive reform, including rent restriction until new housing was built, state control of land, and pensions of £1.00 weekly at 65. But the weight of his attack in December was upon 'the extreme Bolshevist views of those at present controlling the Labour Party', attacking: 'the ILP attitude towards unspeakable horrors, their silent acceptance without protest of such atrocities as the sinking of the Lusitania and hospital ships ... these people are Bolsheviks and Bolshevism is class war. Class ascendance of any kind is autocracy' (60).

59 G Murray, A Man's Life, (London, 1936), p.237. Murray claimed that when his Labour opponent claimed: 'we would never get anything out of the Germans by way of compensation, that cost him a great many votes and it was useful to me'. (p.237).

60 Quotations extracted from Election Manifestoes, 1918.

The anti-pacifist, anti-German, anti-Kaiser propaganda was doubly effective. The attack on pacifism put the Labour Party, divided as it was on the issue of war, in a weak position. The Jingoism of the Lloyd George Coalition created a superficial and albeit temporary sense of national unity against a foreign power. But there was little doubt as to whom this emotion was actually directed against. Barnes used the techniques effectively. He was one of the first to demand that the Kaiser be hanged. But his propaganda in the Gorbals was effectively against Bolshevism. He described himself early on as the anti-Bolshevist candidate. He had left the Labour Party, he told a local audience on 29 November, because MacLean had come into the constituency as a Bolshevist candidate. It would be cowardly, he stated, on his part to have run away and to have left the field to the Bolsheviks. If anyone was disposed to label him or call upon him to label himself, he wanted nothing better than to be called 'anti-Bolshevist'⁽⁶¹⁾.

As early as 18 November, Lloyd George had warned of 'the menace of revolution'. In the next week, Horne in Hillhead elaborated it, arguing there were: 'a number of men who had no other interest except to tear up society by the roots and they had got to guard against such men who were more vociferous than their numbers warranted'⁽⁶²⁾. The hawkish Mitchell Thompson was not slow in attacking the section of the Labour Party 'which was Republican or Bolshevist'. And Winston Churchill adopted in Dundee a stance which he was to maintain later in his long career. 'If this country', he said, 'had been full of John Macleans we would have been captured by the Huns'. Shaw in Kilmarnock was no less vigorous. 'If the Labour Party had been in power at that date (1914) we would not have been safe for a real democracy'⁽⁶³⁾.

61 Glasgow Herald, November 30, 1918...

62 Election Manifesto, 1918.

63 Glasgow Herald, December 14, 1918.

The proposal to nationalise land, McKinder stated in Camlachie, was 'straight Bolshevism',⁽⁶⁴⁾. On the last day of the campaign Lloyd George fulminated that Labour was being run 'by the extreme pacifist Bolshevik group'.

Perhaps McKinder, the Conservative Coalitionist, put the issue more succinctly, on 10 December in deriding his mild Labour opponent as 'Bolshevist'. He: 'earnestly hoped that Glasgow will give such a vote on Saturday as will tell the rest of the Country that this great city, where Bolshevism is thought to be rife, is in fact very far indeed from generally endorsing such ideas ... in face of such a position it seems to say the least of it a pity that Asquithian Liberals should be challenging Coalitionists on comparatively minor issues',⁽⁶⁵⁾.

To sustain their campaign, the Scottish Unionist Association produced separate Scottish propaganda material in the form of twelve pamphlets. Five of them emphasised the Coalition's positive programme including promises for better housing, industrial health and safety, a better deal for the agricultural labourer, a lasting peace, imperial preference and generally for a better Britain. Two attacked the Liberals, one arguing that Asquith 'failed to back our boys at the Front', and the other going even further: 'Mr Asquith, who was as Prime Minister responsible for these appalling errors and their appalling results, is now asking for your confidence and your vote. You have seen how his leadership brought the empire to the edge of disaster',⁽⁶⁶⁾.

But the main weight of Unionist propaganda was against both Bolshevism and Kaiserism. One of 'the certain definite aims of the coalition' was 'to punish the authors of these brutal systems ... to make it impossible for the criminals ever again to obtain power

64 Glasgow Herald, December 4, 1918.

65 Ibid., December 11, 1918.

66 Scottish Unionist Association, General Election Literature for Scotland, 1918.

and influence in Europe or elsewhere'. The Germans had been guilty of 'every crime against God and man'. Women voters in particular, said one pamphlet, were 'the trustees of the silent'. The women's vote must be used not for: 'merely selfish purposes nor ever for a class purpose. There is a duty to the dead'⁽⁶⁷⁾.

The Socialists were labelled as supporters of Germany; one pamphlet entitled 'Pacifists are Black-legs' emphasised:

Amongst the leaders of a section of the Labour Party ... are black-legs to the nation. They would willingly go behind the backs of the nation and particularly the backs of our fighting men. Throughout the war they tried to open negotiations with the Germans while the nation was fighting with Germans for its life ... they would have robbed the nation and their fighting men of their victory.

Even now, a follow-up pamphlet claimed, the socialists were trying to open up communications with the Germans⁽⁶⁸⁾. In fact, the first pamphlet set the theme for the rest: 'What Bolshevist Revolution has done for Russia it would like to do for you' - 'every voter, man and woman, should read and re-read every word in this circular. If you want to make certain they shall not bring these terrible times to you and yours, vote for the Coalition candidate'. The sixth pamphlet promised the abolition of cards and coupons 'to recover our freedom'. There would be less officialdom: 'The theoretical socialists of the ILP and LP whose policy is the nationalisation of all industry means all the controlled business

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.

multiplied ten fold ... the millenium is "tickets for everything and officials to look after everything. all the time".' .The pamphlet then stated there would be a 'coat controller to choose coats for you'⁽⁶⁹⁾ .

The anti-German issue was a facade around which to build a national unity against the Labour Party and when the results were declared most of the victorious MPs made it clear that the Socialist issue was more important than the German one. At the close of voting, the Glasgow Herald editorial writer asked: 'Is it surprising that the Country is unsympathetic to the Labour Party when it tolerates in its ranks those orders and disciplines of the new Bolshevism'⁽⁷⁰⁾?' There was, the paper had written two days earlier: 'nothing compromising in the attitude of Labour ... Nationalisation was the "blessed word" at meetings. The principles of Bolshevism alienated many electors who have been inclined to sympathise with the Labour propaganda'⁽⁷¹⁾. The Scotsman summed up the results as proving the sanity of the electorate and 'their determination to have nothing to do with revolutionary and Bolshevist methods'⁽⁷²⁾. The Coalitionist victor in Bothwell said 'he made this fight one against Bolshevism and Socialism'⁽⁷³⁾. Hope in Haddington had explicitly described his Labour opponent as 'an out and out Bolshevist and Socialist'⁽⁷⁴⁾. The electorate, said Horne, had 'refused to identify themselves with the socialist propaganda'⁽⁷⁵⁾ .

69 Ibid.

70 Glasgow Herald, December 14, 1918.

71 Ibid., December 16, 1918.

72 Scotsman, December 30, 1918.

73 Ibid.

74 Glasgow Herald, December 30, 1918.

75 Ibid.

Barnes stated that the greatest threat facing the country was Bolshevism,⁽⁷⁶⁾ and Barnes said: 'I believe the Labour Party has lost a great chance. If the Labour leaders had fought the Bolsheviks of the country they would have had a large number of seats to their credit'. Pratt, the Liberal Coalitionist in Cathcart, stated that: 'a line was being drawn between those who wish to model the state according to constitutional usage, and those who wish to adopt violent means which involved the tremendous risks they had seen illustrated in Russia'. Churchill concluded that the result was 'a condemnation of tyranny whether it be Bolshevism or Kaiserism',⁽⁷⁷⁾.

What then was the success of the anti-socialist strategy? As Table 1.3 shows the 1918 election results testify to the beginning of the new alignment in modern politics.. Labour which managed only 24,633 votes in 1910 increased its vote ten fold to 285,585, just over one quarter of a million votes, or 22.9% of the votes cast. In contrast the Liberals managed only 163,960 votes, almost half its 1910 total.

TABLE 1.3
Election Results in 1918

	% Vote	
	Scotland	U.K.
Labour	22.9	20.8
Liberal	15.0	13.0
Conservative	32.8	38.6
Coalition Liberal	19.1	12.6

Even if the Coalition Liberal vote were added, the party's vote was little more than its 1910 total, although twice as many people

76 . Scotsman, December 30., 1918.

77 Scotsman, December 30, 1918.

voted in 1918. But perhaps the best illustration of the changing base of Liberal and Labour support is to examine the average votes achieved for each candidate who stood.

TABLE 1.4

Average Votes per Candidate

	<u>Scotland</u>	<u>Great Britain</u>
Labour	6,799	6775
Liberal	4,962	5032
Conservative	9,898	9310
Coalition Liberal	7,934	9622

Source: F W Craig, British Parliamentary Election Results, 1918-1945. (Glasgow, 1968).

Clearly, Labour was doing better than Independent Liberals but when the vote of Coalition Liberals was added, and allowance is made for the four seats in which Liberal fought Coalition Liberal, the Liberal average is still slightly smaller than that of Labour even allowing for the fact that in some seats there was no Conservative opponent to the Liberal.

The position for the Liberals looks even worse if the twenty-three-party contests in which Liberal, Conservative and Labour Parties were in contention are examined. In all but three cases, Edinburgh West, Motherwell and Ayr, the Liberals were pushed into third place, and in none of the twenty contests did they win. And despite the Liberal desire for independence manifest during the later stages of the electoral contest, there were twenty-four contests where no Liberal candidate was in the field.

In terms of parliamentary representation the Liberals were decimated. Of twenty-one Liberal MPs who stood in Scotland without the coupons, only four survived, two of whom had not been opposed by the Coalition and of the other two, Hogge in East Edinburgh had declined to call himself an Asquithian, and in Paisley, McCallum had agreed in the end to fight under the Coalition banner.

No Liberal who stood without Coalition support survived in Glasgow or Lanarkshire. In Glasgow the Liberal position was desperate. Three Coalition Liberals survived as MPs but all the other Liberal candidates, as well as being defeated, had with only one exception also lost their deposits. Overall, the Liberals without the coupons had received only 5% of the vote in Glasgow.

With the defeat also of Asquith in East Fife Independent Liberals were thin on the ground; of those who had been elected, many were not pro-Asquith. However, the operation of the pact had secured seats for Coalition Liberals in almost all of Scotland's rural constituencies and they had also as a result held on to the urban seats. Coalition Liberals won twenty-five of the twenty-eight contests which they entered. Seven had been returned unopposed and in almost all the other cases they had been faced only by a Labour opponent. The Coalition Liberals won three Glasgow seats, the two Renfrew seats, Dumbarton, Dunfermline, Rutherglen, Kilmarnock and Dundee. But their main strength was in the rural areas - they had won all the Highland seats (except Western Isles) and most of the North East and Border seats.

The Conservatives did better in 1918 than in previous elections. Between them, couponed and non-couponed, Conservatives secured thirty seats, gaining one third of the vote. Their vote was only fifty per cent higher than in 1910, but this simply reflected the fact that they did not stand in about half the constituencies; their average vote in contested seats ran at nearly 10,000, substantially higher than that of the other parties. Of the Party's seats, the most striking characteristic was the extent to which they had secured a middle-class base. Eight seats which they won in 1918 were to be retained throughout the twenties - they were the most middle-class seats of Glasgow, Ayrshire, Aberdeen and Edinburgh. Most of their seats were concentrated in mining and industrial areas, outside urban middle-class areas - six in Glasgow, five in Lanarkshire, the two Stirlingshire seats, Midlothian North, and Linlithgow, almost all of which went Labour

in 1922 or 1923. The party was virtually absent from the rural areas, winning only Aberdeenshire Central, Forfar (where its candidate was not couponed), East Fife (where no candidate had the coupon). Thus in 1918, the Conservatism in Scotland relied for its strength primarily on a middle-class base of support; it had yet to secure any major presence in the rural areas of Scotland. That had to await the elections of the nineteen-twenties.

As early as 4 December, the Glasgow Herald had remarked that: 'the struggle is in fact gradually resolving itself into a trial of strength between the Labour Party and the Coalition, with the Asquithian Liberals in the position occupied by Labour at the last election'. On 16 December, the Herald, which believed Labour prospects 'were dimmed in the last few days of the campaign', still believed that the Labour Party would win twelve seats in Scotland, and named Springburn, Shettleston, Bridgeton, Linlithgow as well as Hamilton, Central Edinburgh, West Fife, Govan and Dundee as some of their predictions for Labour gains. The Conservative weekly, the Baillie predicted five Labour gains in Glasgow alone. In fact Labour won only seven Scottish seats, two of which - Dundee (the two member seat where Churchill was only one right wing opponent) and West Fife - it already held. The party's five gains included Hamilton and South Ayrshire, where there were three pro-Coalition candidates in opposition to the Labour challenger, and in both of which the Labour candidate recieved a minority of the votes. But the wins in Govan, Edinburgh Central and North Aberdeen (where Rose had not been fully endorsed by Labour) were impressive. What was as impressive was Labour's performance in other seats where it was only narrowly defeated. In nine seats - some of which had a strong mining vote - Labour was a close second : Dumbarton, Bridgeton, Shettleston, Springburn, West Renfrew and South Midlothian, Stirlingshire West, Bothwell and Linlithgow.

Labour gained over a third of the vote in : Bridgeton, St Rollox, Springburn, Camlachie, Coatbridge, Bothwell, North . Lanark, Rutherglen, Linlithgow, Dumbarton District, South Midlothian, West Renfrew, West and East Stirling.

How important was the Irish vote that favoured Home Rule in 1918? By 1922, there were just over 600,000 Roman Catholics in Scotland, 90% of which were of Irish extraction⁽⁷⁸⁾. Throughout the twenties anti-Catholic groups were to fulminate against the growing influence of the Irish, the Glasgow Herald in 1929 arguing against 'the threat to Scottish nationality of the growth of the racially Irish element in the Community'. But the Catholic community was concentrated in the West of Scotland - over 20% of the population of Glasgow, Motherwell and Paisley while only 2% of the population of a city such as Aberdeen⁽⁷⁹⁾. From his study of the new electorate in 1918, Kinnear suggests that outside Glasgow there were eighteen Scottish constituencies where the Irish vote exceeded 15% of the electorate, ten where the Irish vote exceeded 30%⁽⁸⁰⁾. With the removal of the barriers to a full registration of the working class vote, the Irish vote became more important statistically than it was before 1914. But could it decide the course of elections? All major parties made a commitment on the Irish issue that took them far beyond the positions they had supported in 1910. The Coalition manifesto which recognised that while it was not possible forcibly to submit Ulster to a Home Rule

78 Glasgow Herald, March 23, 1929.

79 J Macaffrey, in D MacRoberts (ed.). Scottish Catholicism, (Edinburgh, 1980), p.230.

80 M Kinnear, The British Voter, p.130.

Parliament, promised to 'explore all practical paths' towards a settlement 'on the basis of self-government'. Asquithian Liberals promised self-government as a 'statutory right'. Labour promised 'freedom for Ireland ... as democratic rights', in effect as Tobin suggests a measure of devolution within the Empire⁽⁸¹⁾.

Throughout the rest of Britain, the United Irish League supported individually proven allies, ensuring that many Irish mandates went to Asquithians rather than Labour. In Scotland, however, the United Irish League, while claiming to support old Liberal allies also, unanimously resolved that Labour was 'the most worthy of our confidence ... the best agency' for the pursuit of Irish freedom⁽⁸²⁾.

The Irish list for Scotland contained twenty-six Labour candidates and fifteen Liberals. In Glasgow this implied support for six Labour candidates and five Liberals and in Lanarkshire for four Labour candidates and five Liberals. Prominent Liberals including Asquith, MacCallum, Sir Donald Maclean and McKinnon Wood received Irish support⁽⁸³⁾. But the Irish list was ineffective not least because there was dissatisfaction locally at the award of the Irish coupon. In Dunbartonshire, local Irish members rebelled against the Liberal Allen and supported the Labour candidate, Martin⁽⁸⁴⁾. In Hamilton, where the Irish Party reaffirmed its support for the

81 For a study of manifestoes on the Irish question, see M Tobin, op.cit., p.88-90.

82 Ibid., p.91.

83 Glasgow Herald, December 7, 1918. A full list of Irish League backed candidates is contained in this edition.

84 Ibid., December 9, 1918.

Liberal MP, Whitehouse, there was a strong movement of Irish support in favour of the Labour candidate Duncan Graham⁽⁸⁵⁾. However, only one Coalition candidate - Keith in Hamilton - attributed his defeat to the Irish vote⁽⁸⁶⁾. In the West of Scotland in particular the Irish vote may have helped to increase the Labour vote in areas such as Dunbartonshire, Lanarkshire and Glasgow and so diminished the anti-Bolshevist propaganda that characterised the election.

In 1918 the Irish vote did not sway seats to Labour and the Liberals. Most of the Liberals it supported did extremely badly, some losing their deposits⁽⁸⁷⁾.

Arguing the poll was unnecessarily low because of deficiencies in the register and the inability of ex-servicement to vote,⁽⁸⁸⁾ Labour could take comfort from the fact that a mere 6% swing to them would produce another ten seats. As James Maxton concluded, the result was: 'very satisfactory considering the wave of jingoism in the land. In the meantime the Labour movement had much to do in the industrial field and in the field of politics'⁽⁸⁹⁾.

85 M Tobin, op.cit., p.92. He argues that 'analysis of the election figures by the pro-Labour Irish Catholic Press did indicate a lack of consistency in following UIL instructions to support Asquithians in preference to Labour'.

86 Scotsman, December 30, 1918.

87 Glasgow Herald, December 7, 1918.

88 Forward estimated only one quarter of soldiers voted. (December 21, 1918).

89 Glasgow Herald, December 30, 1918.

CHAPTER 2

THE ADVANCE OF LABOUR - 1919-1921

I THE THIRD WAY

The years between the General Election of 1918 and 1922 mark the arrival of the Labour Party in both local and national politics in Scotland. They witness the biggest advance that the party has seen in its sixty yearlong history - with a quadrupling of Labour representation in local government between 1914 and 1920 and spectacular Parliamentary by-election successes in both 1919 and 1921. In 1911, the last elections locally before the war, Labour had increased its local representation to 200 representatives on local and parish councils and school boards. By the end of 1920 Labour had nine hundred councillors or representatives - 340 local councillors, 473 parish councillors and 85 education authority members⁽¹⁾. From 1919 onwards few doubted that Labour would win dramatic gains in parliamentary elections.

But Labour's advance was uneven and occurred in an economic and social context that was changing from the high expectations generated by the return of peace to the dwindling hopes of security ushered in by rising unemployment. At an ideological level, the political debate within the Labour Movement oscillated from support for direct action - even syndicalism - to support for traditional parliamentary methods. In Scotland, as we shall see, a compromise position which protected the parliamentary wing of the Labour Movement was the most strongly and successfully advocated and became dominant by 1920. Rising unemployment had made a syndicalist position even less attractive. What had been an aggressive movement for power became a defensive and protective response to depression and the threat to living standards. The disaster of the miners' "Black Friday" followed by the failure of the 1922 Engineers' strike confirmed the weakness of the industrial left.

1 Forward, November 13, 1921. 101

Despite defeat in the General Election of 1918, much ground had been gained and with a larger vote, more education and more propaganda, the Labour view was that the country could be expected to turn further to Labour in the near future. With the growing threat of unemployment, the chronic bad housing and a new political awareness amongst sections of the industrial workforce and those being demobilised, an immediate programme for action seemed to be needed. It was this need that raised the question of direct action and syndicalism and of the role the extra-parliamentary left would play in the development of Scottish politics.

The Independent Labour Party had made the running in traditional Labour politics in Scotland throughout the general election. In 1918, their most prominent Scottish theoretician, John Wheatley had considered in detail what attitude the Labour Movement should take to syndicalism, revolution and direct action generally. Writing in Forward in what he called 'an examination of some current criticism of ILP policy' he had argued that: 'the people of this country may have socialism when they consider it worth their vote...the workers if they desire may during the present year elect a socialist government'. He went on to reject both syndicalism and revolution:

I fail to see how whether morally justified or not a popular revolt in present circumstances could be successful in Britain while political power is held by the capitalists...a bloody revolution is far too slow whether viewed from the standpoint of democracy or expediency. I prefer the ILP policy of relying more upon brains than bullets. (2)

In reply to criticisms from the left, Wheatley was to emphasise his position that political action was most important to securing working-class power. He had been 'anxious not to minimise the

2 Forward, January 25, 1918.

value of industrial action', he claimed. But his main concern was 'to impress upon the workers of this country the tremendous importance of political power'⁽³⁾.

However the defeat of Labour in a general election which gave the Coalition Government such a massive majority in Parliament, created a new situation. Forward had remarked in June 1918 that 'the General Election will decide whether we are to establish our liberty by constitutional or unconstitutional means', and it began to offer implicit support for direct action in the wake of defeat at the polls⁽⁴⁾. As the paper remarked, as early as 18 January 1919, industrial action was: 'the longest way round and the roughest. They have the right to make their fight in the way that seems best...having missed the parliamentary opportunity there is nothing else for it meantime than to fight industrially'⁽⁵⁾.

The problem for the ILP was to hold the centre of the stage, and in the absence of elections, that required a new appreciation of the relationship between political and industrial action at a time when the left was split into numerous factions. Within the Labour Party there were three prominent schools. A first led by Clynes and Thomas - and supported in Scotland by such MPs as William Graham and William Adamson - argued against any direct action and wanted to confine industrial strike activity to purely industrial ends. While Adamson was the most senior advocate of that school of thought, in Scotland the running for it was made by men like William Graham recently elected as Member of Parliament for Central Edinburgh. In 1919 William Graham's position led to bitter divisions within his own constituency⁽⁶⁾. At a meeting in

3 Forward, April 4, 1918.

4 Forward, June 20, 1918.

5 Ibid., January 18, 1919.

6 Edinburgh Central ILP Minutes, June 16, 1919.

which the Chairman was unseated (and later resigned), a motion that William Graham 'did not deserve the support of the working class' was put. Graham only survived by thirty-six votes to twenty five⁽⁷⁾. (The Edinburgh Central ILP branch voted to join unity talks with BSP, SLP and Communist Workers' League representatives⁽⁸⁾ and to send a delegate to the BSP Provisional Committee Conference in June 1919.)

However the problem was that parliamentary action was too obviously ineffective, as even Ramsay Macdonald was not slow to argue in a regular column he wrote for Forward, and at the Labour Party's 1919 Conference, there were strong complaints that 'the PLP was not doing its real work as a political weapon' and that 'politics is too serious to be played with by trade union officials', such as the existing Labour MPs. Even strong parliamentarians like Herbert Morrison argued that the PLP 'has failed in voicing the aspirations on great national questions of principle' and others claimed there was little difference between Labour and Liberals. The Parliamentary Leader, Adamson, had as his only defence that 'their first duty, their chief work... was to put the view of Labour as faithfully and intelligently as they possibly could'⁽⁹⁾.

The Parliamentary Party was in fact a major embarrassment for those who supported Parliamentary Socialism. In June 1920 the Scottish Executive complained the party in Parliament had mustered only 19

7 Ibid., June 9, 1919. There had been some resignations from those who claimed that the ILP was merely 'a reform party'. Graham's principal antagonist was Robert Foulis, who had stood as a Labour candidate in 1918.

8 Edinburgh Central ILP Minutes, June 16, 1919.

9 Labour Party, Report of Annual Conference, 1919, p.164.

votes against the rent bill. Later the Executive went further, complaining about the 'extreme dissatisfaction at the attendance record of the present parliamentary Labour members in the House of Commons':

The Executive,...calls upon the National Labour Party to take immediate opinion on these matters as the state of affairs is seriously prejudicing Labour's prestige in the country.(10)

A second school, within the syndicalist tradition, supported direct action as the only course for achieving a fundamental transformation of existing society. This separation of industrial and parliamentary or municipal politics ran counter to the traditions of the ILP and the Labour Party in Scotland, although its advocates ranged across the various political parties, the British Socialist Party (BSP), the Socialist Labour Party (SLP) and the shop stewards' movement. Hinton writes that a substantial proportion of the Communist Party's new recruits of 1920-21 were more in favour of syndicalism than of the Bolshevik idea of a vanguard party, which they had not fully grasped. Thus he concludes that 'the characteristic and distinguishing feature of communism in Britain during 1919-21 was not the idea of the revolutionary party but the idea of soviet power'. While Hinton argues that during the war years the shop stewards' movement had pursued neither a strategy for alternative union organisations nor for amalgamation of existing unions into 'industrial unions' and had thus failed to create any alternative organisation to existing unions, by 1920 the revolutionaries in Scotland had embraced a theory of 'soviets' as alternatives to the existing political and industrial structures and as vehicles for the capture of political power. But they were not united, some working through existing

10 Labour Party, Scottish Executive Minutes, June 14, 1920.

unions, some arguing for an extended 'Triple Alliance' and others for alternative workers' organisation. Indeed Direct Action which argued not simply for workers' committees in industry but also for 'social committees' in communities was one of the upshots of the discussions of the period. But as Hinton concludes:

In their efforts to promote unity by placing the struggle for soviet power at the centre of the political agenda the shop stewards could not avoid revealing their own isolation from the mass of the workers. (11)

The novelty was the emergence of a third way. It was a course embraced by Macdonald, Forward, the ILP in Scotland, and some trade union advocates. Smillie was probably the most prominent supporter. He was a member in 1918 of the ILP and of the Scottish Committee of the Labour Party, as well as being the recognised leader of the Scottish miners. The basis of the third way was to continue to stress the importance of parliamentary activity, to urge the Labour Party in Parliament to become more effective, and to emphasise the importance of propaganda and organisation as a means of developing socialist consciousness. But the hinge of the strategy - and its novelty - was its support for direct action as a means of bringing the existing Parliament and Government into line with its constitutional responsibilities to the majority in the country. Direct Action was not an alternative to Parliament, but a complement to it. As 1919 and 1920 progressed, support for industrial action inherent in the third way could give ground to a renewed emphasis on political organisation. But the flexibility of its approach allowed Labour and the ILP to hold the political centre in Scotland, as militancy first increased and then declined after the events of January 1919 showed it to be ineffective.

In February 1919 in an article entitled, 'ILP Stocktaking', Forward set out its arguments in favour of 'a coming together...an agreed programme of action'. It believed that capitalism had strengthened itself as a result of the war and election, and while Labour was

11 J Hinton, The First Shop Stewards, op.cit. p.320.

restless and wanted to kick, the danger was that it would dissipate its workers in disconnected strikes⁽¹²⁾. In the pre-war era, it suggested, industrial and political democracy had been isolated from each other; the failures of trade union leaderships had nurtured the unofficial movement which had 'developed the weapon of industrial action' so that the industrial movement could now claim 'an independence of and equality with political democracy...the control of the workshop by Labour is as important as the control of Parliament by Labour'. Yet the two problems could not be made separate: 'Socialism remains the guide...under socialism the control of the workshop must be such as to give the worker a sense of liberty...the full doctrine of workshop control and industrial democracy can be stated only when the community of the workshop is set in the wider community'⁽¹³⁾. This article offered a defence of industrial action within a wider commitment to Parliamentary politics. Johnston, Forward's editor, later remarked direct action was 'justifiable in a democracy where a minority prevents the majority from exercising its will', and the justification was that 'it can compel constitutional action by a government'⁽¹⁴⁾.

Surprisingly perhaps Ramsay Macdonald put himself at the head of this movement for the third way. While careful to say that he was 'as far from being converted to anti-parliamentarism as I ever was', he argued: 'this Parliament has no moral authority. When political opposition is crushed by fraud or force industrial organisation is the only defence that is left'⁽¹⁵⁾. Macdonald was extremely

12 Forward, February 1, 1919.

13 Ibid.

14 Forward, September 28, 1919.

15 Ibid., January 11, 1919.

careful to state he was no syndicalist:

For the Labour Party to say no politics, no Parliament, direct action and nothing else would not indicate the intelligence they would want in order to guide the country for the next twenty years.(16)

Nevertheless he believed that:

The problem of the political strike has nothing to do with the constitution. The only question is: Is it practicable? Will it be effective? In some cases it will fail, and in some cases pass beyond itself into revolution.(17)

In September 1919, he argued that in the next six years, Labour must be in authority to carry out major reforms, and that direct action was 'a means of gaining a political end and therefore a part of political action' (18).

Maxton also at this time took the third approach: when he was asked to judge an essay competition, 'Can Industrial Action bring the Socialist Commonwealth? If so how?', he concluded 'the more reasonable course is a combination of industrial and political action' (19). It was also the attitude taken by the leading members of the STUC. When they met in April 1919, the President claimed that on the Russian question they had: 'to use industrial action to break the Government...As a constitutionalist he did not advocate this policy in a light-hearted fashion. Such a policy should not be necessary... but strong measures were necessary to make the Government keep its pledges' (20).

16 Ibid.

17 Forward, July 5, 1919.

18 Forward, September 20, 1919.

19 Forward, July 6, 1919.

20 Forward, April 26, 1919.

In 1919 the third way emphasised the use of direct action to bring Parliament and the Government into line with the majority in the country. But as time went on the emphasis changed: it began to be argued that a general election offered the more effective means of bringing about this end. Macdonald began to persuade Smillie and others to support political rather than industrial pressure for nationalisation of the mines. By March 1920 Smillie was arguing that nationalisation was a political question and ineffective strikes in an attempt to achieve it would seriously damage Labour politically. He added, however, that he would envisage a Labour government having to call a general strike in support of Parliament⁽²¹⁾. Behind these shifting views lay the critical experience of events in 1919 and 1920.

21 Forward, March 20, 1920.

II THE JANUARY 1919 STRIKES

For all his exaggerations of the dangers of militancy leading to revolution, Sir Basil Thomson accurately judged the mood of Britain in late December 1918 and early January 1919. Writing at the end of 1918, he argued that 'the shadow of the general election has weighed heavily on the revolutionaries...revolutionary meetings have been few'⁽¹⁾. Later he added:

The heavy defeat of the extremists at the general election is having the effect that was anticipated. On the pleas that the House of Commons cannot be trusted to give a fair hearing to the grievances of the working class, they are all for direct action and they are snatching at the opportunity offered by the unrest in the army to further corrupt its morale in the hope of bringing revolution nearer. (2)

The widespread strikes in January 1919 were therefore extremely important. While events for a time threatened to move completely out of control of the official leaders of the Labour movement, in the end by managing to regain control they set the course for the triumph of parliamentary politics in Scotland. The future shape of the left in Scotland was conditioned by the responses and reactions to the industrial militancy of the early months of 1919. The movement for strike action on the "forty hours" question threatened to cut off the official leaderships from the rank and file and increasingly the official leaderships had to yield to the demands of unofficial groups. The movement showed how the left would be split throughout the twenties - but the decision in January 1919 of the Scottish and British miners not to strike, the pressure of union officials, and the absence of effective leadership led to a dissipation of activity. With the defeat of 'direct action', a renewed interest in political and parliamentary activity developed.

1 Cabinet Papers, 'Revolutionary Organisations on the UK, GT 6603, December 30, 1918.

2 Ibid., GT 6654, January 13, 1919.

The "forty hours" strike was to be far more of a Scottish than simply a West of Scotland event, than commentators have so far acknowledged. Its history began not with the end of the war but a long time before this. The 1916 Scottish Advisory Council of the Labour Party had supported a right to work bill 'which shall have for its object the legalising of a working day with a maximum of eight hours'. This was advocated 'in view of the disorganised state in which the Labour market will be after the war'⁽³⁾. In 1917 unions such as the Engineers began to mobilise in support of a forty hour week. Throughout 1918 a joint committee of the STUC and the Labour Party considered what action they might take. In March 1918 at a joint conference in Glasgow the forty hour week was supported⁽⁴⁾. While the STUC voted for a thirty hour proposal at their conference, a further joint conference in June decided to support a forty-four hour week immediately and a forty hour week after the war⁽⁵⁾. When the Scottish Conference of the Labour Party reconvened in September 1918, it was the ILP who made the running with a thirty hour week proposal. For the ILP, Stewart argued they wanted socialism, 'not a little reform here and there', but Trade Union Executives, delegates were told, supported a forty hour week, and the Scottish Executive's own recommendation for a forty hour week was accepted by 46 votes⁽⁶⁾.

Direct action was all the more inevitable because in 1918 there was no possibility of legislative action to secure a reduced working week. The Ministry of Labour believed the matter was entirely one

3 Scottish Conference Report, 1916, p.43.

4 Labour Party; Scottish Council, Executive Report, 1918, p.16-17.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., pp.36-37.

for employers and workers in different trade unions who should negotiate on it separately. It told the STUC this in December 1918. Following a special STUC meeting in December which agreed on a series of policy demands, the Labour Party's Scottish Executive and the STUC's Parliamentary Committee met jointly to resolve 'to use every means to unify the forces of labour to bring about a reduction in the working hours to a maximum of forty hours a week or eight hours a day'. The Parliamentary Committee of the STUC was entrusted to deal with the situation⁽⁷⁾.

The forty hour demand seemed to unify the whole movement but unofficial groups threatened to move far more quickly, and with more determination, than the STUC. The Ways and Means Committee, a product of the shop stewards' movement on the Clyde, called together on 18 January delegates from shop steward's committees from all over Scotland to consider strike action not for a forty but a thirty hour week. A joint committee around the Glasgow Trades Council, on which the Clyde Worker's Committee and the STUC Parliamentary Committee were represented, also favoured a thirty hours demand, although only after a close vote, and Shinwell, then Chairman of the Glasgow Trades Council, reported that the matter was held over in order to try to unite on demands acceptable to all workers. He said the movement was 'not revolutionary in character' nor 'inspired by the legitimate demand...for more leisure'. 'It was attributable solely to the fear of unemployment in the near future and the desire to make room for the men from the army and navy'. He said that only the concession of a forty hour week - with no loss of wages - could avert a stoppage⁽⁸⁾.

7 Scottish Trades Union Congress, Annual Report, 1919.

8 Glasgow Herald, 23 January, 1919.

The STUC decided though only on the casting vote of the Glasgow Trades Council Secretary, Shaw, to retain their representative on the joint committee; and it also called a consultative conference.

The unofficial movements had seized the initiative from union leaders, the Labour Party and the STUC. While Hugh Lyon, Secretary of the Commercial and Motormen's Union who sat on the STUC Parliamentary Committee argued that 'the people were not divided on the forty hours question...merely divided on the action to be taken', he had to concede that the rampant dissatisfaction on the Clyde made the position of officials extremely difficult. As Lyon was to suggest, strike action was 'to a certain extent hurried by a certain section'. In response the aim of the STUC's Parliamentary Committee's Consultative Conference was 'to make the general strike a complete success'⁽⁹⁾.

A number of unofficial and official disputes were already in motion in January, and official negotiations were taking place on demands from railmen, miners and engineers for better working hours, as well as wage increases. There were disputes in Dundee, Aberdeen, and Glasgow as well as those involving soldiers in Stirling⁽¹⁰⁾. The railmen were negotiating for an eight hour day and the engineering and shipbuilding trades for a 47 hour week, the Iron and Steel Confederation for an eight hour day, textile workers for a 45 hour week, and municipal employees a 44 hour week. Miners were putting in a demand for a 6 hour day and a 30% increase in wages⁽¹¹⁾. In these circumstances it was hardly surprising perhaps that national unions like the Engineers (who were later to suspend their Glasgow District Secretary, Harry Hopkins) the National Union of Mineworkers, and the Transport Workers and Scottish Union of Dock Labourers were against immediate action⁽¹²⁾.

9 Glasgow Herald, January 23, 1919.

10 Scotsman, January 10, 1919, Also January 13, 1919.

11 Ibid., January 16, 1919.

12 Glasgow Herald, January 24, 1919.

But while the profile of industrial demands was confused and varied, some unions did come out in favour of a general stoppage. The Association of Iron Moulders of Scotland was favourable towards this, the union's officials being some of the most militant in Scotland⁽¹³⁾. The Electrical Trades Union also supported the stoppage⁽¹⁴⁾. The Operative Bakers Union offered general support, although it also wanted to wait to examine the course of events⁽¹⁵⁾. The National Union of Clerks favoured a 32½ hour week but supported the forty-hour stoppage⁽¹⁶⁾. After a meeting of delegates on 23 January the Scottish Brassmoulders Union supported strike action;⁽¹⁷⁾ the Irondressers Union followed as did the Amalgamated Society of Toolmakers,⁽¹⁸⁾ the Shop Assistants Union, Scottish Building Trades Union, the British Seafarers Union⁽¹⁹⁾ and the Dye Workers and Kindred Trades⁽²⁰⁾.

In Dundee the Trades Council favoured strike action⁽²¹⁾ and the National Union of General Workers in Dundee⁽²²⁾ organised for the strike. In Aberdeen the Executive of the shipbuilding trades were defeated by their members on strike action and resolved to call for a joint committee of the Aberdeen Trades Council to organise action. Clydebank, Coatbridge and Dumbarton Trades Council all

13 Ibid., Also January 23, 1919.

14 Ibid., January 27, 1919.

15 Ibid., January 23, 1919.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., January 24, 1919.

18 Ibid.

19 Glasgow Herald, January 25, 1919

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid, January 24, 1919

22 Ibid., January 25, 1919.

gave support as did a Greenock Committee, formed after a mass meeting attended by Shinwell⁽²³⁾. In Arbroath engineers voted to strike as did the branch of the Workers' Union, if others were to follow⁽²⁴⁾.

The position in Edinburgh was more confused. An unofficial Forth Workers' Committee was formed to organise strike action amongst shipbuilding and engineering workers⁽²⁵⁾. One of the moving forces behind it was Robert Foulis, who had been Labour candidate in Midlothian and Peebles at the 1918 election and was later to join the Communist Party (and to be involved in a dispute over his recognition as a candidate for the 1922 election). Edinburgh Trades Council endorsed the "40 hours" resolution and agreed to wait for a decision by the STUC⁽²⁶⁾. Edinburgh and Leith ASE and the Amalgamated Union of Labour also both favoured the "40 hours" movement and agreed to wait for the advice of the STUC⁽²⁷⁾. The ASE decision was that if the congress resolved on a general strike, the men would fall in with the movement. Plans for general stoppages to take place from 28 January at Leith shipyards were announced. But while a meeting of 2000 strikers took place on 29 January, the Edinburgh Trades Council Executive decided not to support the strike. As this event was on, the brassfounders, electricians, engineers, ironmoulders, iron and steel dressers, and weighing machine makers in Edinburgh were out, some officially and some unofficially. But the Chairman of the Trades Council Executive argued that caution had been thrown to the winds with

23 Ibid., January 24, 1919 and the Bulletin No. 5.

24 Ibid., January 25, 1919.

25 Ibid., January 23, 1919.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., Also January 24, 1919.

many trade unionists given no chance of expressing their opinions; if there had been a slight delay a national conference could have decided the matter nationally; 'the manner of the strike's beginnings was a disgrace to trades unions' ⁽²⁸⁾.

Outside Glasgow, the storm centre was the mining industry - despite the official decisions to have no strike action in January. The Executive of the Scottish Mineworkers completely opposed the strike ⁽²⁹⁾. The Miners Federation Conference had voted for different demands - 30% wages increase, a 6 hour day and 'just treatment for demobilised and unemployed miners'. The Scottish Mine Workers Executive heard 'these three questions were already being negotiated by the Executive with representatives of the Government'. The Minutes record that in view of this 'the Scottish Executive entirely dissociated itself from the present erratic strike movement and recommended miners in Scotland to continue at work pending the reply of the Government...so that in the event of an unfavourable reply being received from the Government, a common course of action may be decided upon by miners all over the British coalfields' ⁽³⁰⁾.

However before the Scottish Mineworkers Executive had made its views public, miners were out unofficially in Fife and Lanarkshire. By 24 January 14,000 miners and by 27 January 24,000 were on strike in Fife alone, although a ballot voted narrowly against official action by the union ⁽³¹⁾. In Fife the unofficial elements had

28 Ibid., January 30, 1919.

29 Glasgow Herald, January 28, 1919.

30 National Union of Scottish Mineworkers, Executive, January 1919.

31 Glasgow Herald, January 31, 1919.

called for a six hour day. In Lanarkshire the same issue was argued, but far more bitterly. 9,000 Lanarkshire miners' downed tools on the first day, with far more striking in future days⁽³²⁾. While the Scottish Miners' Executive called the stoppage 'unconstitutional', blaming it on irresponsible persons outside the miners' union, and urged its members 'to disregard the pickets', the Stirling and Lanarkshire miners forced the issue with their own union. As the Minutes of the Lanarkshire Executive record:

Meeting of the Executive Committee had not taken place owing to the premises being in the possession of a number of irresponsible parties who claimed to be sent as delegates from meeting that had been held in a few different districts. The mob of people had surrounded the building. The members of the EC were intimidated, coerced into submitting and agreeing upon the following programme.

Thursday - idle day
Further meeting next day
Ballot on official strike _____ (33)

The Glasgow Herald argued that the picketing amounted 'practically to terrorism'⁽³⁴⁾.

The pressure continued for several days, with the Lanarkshire Executive, unable to meet in its usual offices of Hamilton,

32 Ibid., January 28, 1919.

33 Lanarkshire County Union, Miners Executive, January 29, 1919.

34 Glasgow Herald, January 30, 1919.

eventually removing itself to Edinburgh. When the Executive refused on 30 January to make the strike official, the miners' buildings in Hamilton had been invaded and 'to prevent loss of life and further damage to the property the Executive Committee announced that Friday would also be recognised as a further idle day',⁽³⁵⁾. It met in Glasgow a day later to complain of the 'action of outside agencies and irresponsible persons' and to advise a return to work. This advice went unheeded and most Lanarkshire districts remained idle⁽³⁶⁾. The Executive then met on 1 February in Edinburgh and refused to go ahead with a delegate conference on the grounds that it was 'impossible...without the risk of intimidation and violence',⁽³⁷⁾. But, as the strike lost momentum in the next few days Lanarkshire followed Fife and Stirling in returning to work. On 3 February, the Executive could express some satisfaction over the solution⁽³⁸⁾. However, the offices remained closed for another week; some districts remained out for that time and the Reforms Committees did not disintegrate but became firmly established within the unions.

The strikes which began on January 28 were viewed by the Conservative press as 'the first step towards that squalid terrorism of the Russian Revolution and it was claimed that the George Square events were inspired by 'Bolshevism',⁽³⁹⁾. It

35 Lanarkshire County Union Miners Executive, January 30, 1919.

36 Ibid., January 31, 1919.

37 Ibid., February 3, 1919.

38 Ibid., February 1, 1919.

39 Glasgow Herald, For other press views see A Nassibian, op.cit., p.75.

evoked an over-reaction by the Government - the steps in which are traced by Maclean⁽⁴⁰⁾.

The strikes threatened to escalate with the decision of the electricians to favour strike action and therefore a black out in Glasgow, and, even after the George Square riots of January 31, continued for ten days more until a decision was reached on February 10, for 'a resumption to perfect the organisation of forces...on a national basis'⁽⁴¹⁾. With the return to work, there was initially no feeling that the strike was a turning-point or indeed a failure. According to Harry McShane:

We regarded the forty hour strike not as a revolution but as a beginning. Other things would follow: it was but the first rank and file agitation to be led by the socialists after the war. (42)

Shinwell was later to argue that the achievement of the miners' seven hour day, the continuation of rent restriction and the forty four hour minimum week (which came from the National Industrial Conference) were due to the action of the strikers:

They had the effect of forcing the government to pay lip service to the welfare of the state...there can be little doubt that these small concessions were given because of Red Friday in Glasgow.(43)

40 For a fuller study of the events see I Maclean, 'Red Clydeside 1915-1919', in R Quinault and J Stevenson (eds.). Popular Protest and Public Order (Six studies in British History 1790-1920), (London, 1974)). Interestingly while Shinwell has claimed that he favoured constitutional protest throughout the dispute, he was accused by a fellow striker later of urging 'terroristic methods'. Forward, January 22, 1921.

41 Glasgow Herald, February 11, 1919.

42 H McShane, with J Smith, Harry McShane: No Mean Fighter (London, 1978) p.119.

43 E Shinwell, Conflict without Malice, (London, 1955) p.65-66.

And Tom Bell argued that there was little demoralisation immediately after the 1919 strike:

We didn't think we would be defeated. I am sure that if there had been another movement, a strike of the Triple Alliance for the miners, or some other national strike we would have come out again. (44)

In Glasgow for example 150,000 attended the May Day demonstration compared with 100,000 in 1918⁽⁴⁵⁾.

But there had been two problems that had crippled activity early in 1919. The first was that the Scottish strike leaders had hoped to bring the miners fully into the 'forty hours' action. Maclean who was in England during the course of the strike argued that without the miners, the 1919 strike could not hope to succeed⁽⁴⁶⁾. But by failing to win the support of the miners' union, for immediate strike action, despite the similarity of the miners' demands, the unofficial elements within the miners' union had to bow to the argument that the miners would negotiate their own demands separately. The second problem was that Scottish leaders were hamstrung by their union leaders nationally. In the inquest on what had gone wrong in January, the leadership of London head offices was blamed. Indeed, the final Strike Bulletin summed up a widespread feeling.

London Executives don't understand our aspirations here and never take the trouble to find out what is wrong when a strike occurs. We have to emancipate ourselves from the dictatorship of the London juntas by building an organisation which will be under our control and function when we want it to function. (47)

44 T Bell, Pioneering Days, (London, 1941), p.72.

45 Forward, May 3 1918, See also May 10, 1919.

46 The Call, January 23, January 30, 1919.

47 Forty Hours Strike Bulletin, February 12, 1919.

Certainly the strike lost momentum as leaders waited for the Transport Workers Federation, the Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions as well as the miners' executive to take action. The growth of a centralized trade union bureaucracy was to become a major restraint on union militancy in the twenties, despite the growth of the shop stewards' movement⁽⁴⁸⁾.

The Forty Hours Strike had threatened to isolate the official leaders of the Labour Movement, especially its political leaders. Many, like Patrick Dollan, who had doubts about the efficacy of the action could only act as aides to the strike committee, Dollan editing the 'Strike Bulletin', whose circulation reached 20,000 at the peak of activity⁽⁴⁹⁾. The resolution of the strike did not make traditional political methods immediately acceptable. John Muir was to argue in Forward that the unofficial movement was 'here to stay'. It was important to 'prevent a serious rupture in the whole movement', he argued, and indeed he felt that the Labour Movement could now 'emerge from the present crisis stronger and better equipped'⁽⁵⁰⁾. In the long run, the Scottish Trades Union Congress and national unions were to put their houses in more efficient order to allow them to retain the initiative. In the short run the STUC and the Labour Party's Scottish Executive had had to run with the crowd, the Executive for example demanding an

48 Both the STUC and the TUC strengthened their central organisations in the post-war decade. For the TUC see V Allen, 'The Reorganisation of the TUC, 1918-1927,' British Journal of Sociology, 12, 1960; For the STUC, see J Craigen, The Scottish Trades Union Congress, Heriot Watt University, MLitt., 1975.

49 Glasgow Trades Council, Forty Hour Strike Records. Through the paper's surplus, it was possible to subsidise the Defence Fund for the strikers who were put on trial and subsequently jailed.

50 Forward, February 22, 1919.

enquiry into the 'unwarranted and brutal police behaviour during the strike', and calling for public works to combat unemployment⁽⁵¹⁾.

Only gradually did official leaders begin to regain control. In March the National Executive of the Labour Party resisted pressure from Scottish organisations for a special conference on direct action⁽⁵²⁾. While the miners voted for strike action in March 1919, and the Triple Alliance and the TUC supported direct action for the nationalisation of the mines in June, the immediate situation was defused because the miners agreed to the Sankey Commission and by mid-summer the miners' demands were winning less sympathy from other trade unions. In June the Labour Party's National Executive exercised a moderating influence on the Triple Alliance proposals for direct action. In October during the rail strike, the railway unions did not bother to call for a miners' strike in their support,⁽⁵³⁾ and in December 1919 the question of direct action in support of the miners was postponed. By March 1920 an alternative proposal, the 'mines for the nation' campaign, was accepted but by then unemployment was beginning to diminish efforts at militancy.

While both Scottish and National Executives of the Party spent much time considering what action Labour could take against British intervention in Russia, the Labour Party was careful to diminish the role of direct action. During discussions of the 'Hands off Russia' campaign in June 1919, the National Executive resolved that 'the organisation of industrial action in pursuit of political objects is not within the scope or powers of the Labour Party'⁽⁵⁴⁾.

51 Labour Party National Executive Committee Minutes, February 12, 1919.

52 Labour Party National Executive Committee, March 5, 1919.

53 Ibid., June 5, 1919.

54 Ibid., June 25, 1919.

The railwaymens' strike in 1919 saw a solidarity in Scotland, around the principle of a living wage. For Smillie the issue was the reduction of wages everywhere. But while the Scottish anti-socialist organisations equated the strike with incipient Bolshevism the issue was never the nationalisation of the railways or any other broader issue. As the Railwaymens' Strike Bulletin demonstrated, the railwaymen drew on widespread support - from the engineers to the dockers - around wage demands. But if any political organisation was involved in their support, it was the ILP with, for example, Dollan editing the Glasgow strikers' bulletin⁽⁵⁵⁾.

The railway strike is instructive of the new alignment of forces in the country. It was a strike that the Government allowed to happen, and a dispute which was partially solved through mediation by the Labour Party. In February 1919, the railwaymen were granted an eight hour day; in March concessions on equalising pay were made; in the next three months agreement was reached on the working day and week, as well as a week's holiday yearly and standardisation of wages. In July a 38 hour week was accepted and in August the government made a wages settlement with the locomotivemen, drivers and firemen. But in October the Government chose to fight the railmen on the grounds that whatever was laid down with regard to railmen would influence what was to be claimed throughout the country. Yet the Government were prepared to concede after the Labour Party National Executive intervened to promote a settlement for granting 5/- per day minimum wage.

It was a sign how far the pendulum had begun to swing back to traditional political methods that when Smillie spoke in Scotland during the rail strike in October 1919, he argued that the Government could only be defeated if 'anything that savoured of revolution' was avoided:

55 Glasgow and District Railwaymens Strike Bulletin No. 2, September 29, 1919.

Let them be passive resisters, and let the Government see that they could not stampede the people with giving them an opportunity of shooting them down. If patience and forbearance were exercised, the government would be defeated and have to appeal to the country. The electors could then turn them out of office and return to parliament the men they desired to form the government.(56)

Despite a desire for left unity, the most militant sections of the left were to spend much of 1919 arguing amongst themselves and dissipating what strength they had. With the Third International formed in March 1919, neither the BSP the SLP nor the ILP could agree on its attitudes to the call for unity around Russian leadership; nor in the 'unity' negotiations in Britain, could agreement among the ILP, BSP and SLP on questions such as Labour Party affiliation be secured. More than that, John McLean argued that a general strike could be organised that would defend both the Russian workers and Irish Home Rule, increasingly placing him out on a limb with his previous supporters in the BSP. McLean was eventually to refuse to join the new Communist Party and was to argue for a Scottish Republic. And when the conference of Communist unity groups was held early in 1920 to prepare the ground for the Communist Party, it was not joined by McLean and only a small group of ILP defectors took part. While it included many leading members of the shop stewards' movement, it did not include the Socialist Labour Party⁽⁵⁷⁾. But by that time, the militancy of the immediate post-war months was being dissipated not only by victimisation⁽⁵⁸⁾ but by the reality of unemployment.

56 Forward, October 4, 1919.

57 For an official account of the steps to the formation of the Communist Party see J Klugmann, History of the Communist Party of Great Britain, Vol.1 (London, 1968). For a more critical analysis from a pro Maclean perspective, see W Kendall, The British Revolutionary Movement, 1900-1921, (London, 1969), pp284-291. Perhaps the most succinct account is contained in J Hinton, The First Shop Stewards, and his later essay with J Hyman, Trade Union and Revolution: The Industrial Politics of the Early Communist Party (London, 1975).

58 The Worker, February 22, 1919.

III ELECTORAL SUCCESSESS

The first test of Labour's strength came in April, 1919, with the Education Authority elections, where Labour stood on a specific programme that included free school meals, free boots and clothes to needy children, school baths, medical treatment for schoolchildren, decent teachers' salaries, and an education system which would sponsor 'citizenship'. In Glasgow alone Labour delivered 44,000 election addresses, 15,000 handbills, and held 24 meetings. The Scottish Executive of the Labour Party organised an education conference for candidates, and local organisations were urged to distinguish between four categories of candidates - those friendly to the party, those neutral and those hostile, as well as Labour nominees. In fact, Labour was able to place 185 candidates in the field throughout Scotland, including 21 in Glasgow (for 48 seats), 8 (for 23 seats) in Edinburgh, and 18 (for 21 seats) in Aberdeen. But not only was the poll low (in Aberdeen, for example, 12% and in Edinburgh 19%) but Labour did badly. There was, said Forward, 'miserably small polls and great indifferences amongst electors normally Labour'. On the other hand, 'The Catholics polled splendidly and exhibited a magnificent operation'. The problem in other words, was not only apathy, but religion which drew off support from Labour. The Labour share of the poll varied from one third, the high watermark in South Lanarkshire down to about an eightieth in many districts⁽¹⁾.

Labour won only 85 seats and even these were won with the acquiescence of the Catholic voters. The Catholic Socialist notes recorded on 12 April, 'It is doubtful if in any constituency outside of Shettleston and Bridgeton a Labour member could have won without the Catholic vote and in almost every division the Catholics could have carried another candidate to victory had they preferred to do so instead of presenting the seat to Labour'. In Glasgow only Maxton's election, after redistribution of second

1 Forward, February 8, April 12, 19, 1919. See also Labour Party, Scottish Executive, March 3, 1919.

preferences, would have taken place without the Catholic vote. In Edinburgh the position was similar. Herbert Heighton, the campaign Chairman wrote that, 'the election has surely driven home the need for a constant propaganda among the people of the Labour Party on education, local government and civic politics generally...finance is essential...but everything depends on the rank and file who must be got to take an interest in their own affairs'.

If this were insufficient proof of the challenge that Labour faced, on the left from industrial militancy and on the right from apathy and indifference amongst its potential vote, then two Glasgow authority by-elections were to drive the point home. Two by-elections early in June in Whitevale and in Jordanhill yielded equally depressing results. On the one hand, Martin, the defeated candidate in Whitevale, concluded that 'it was the same old story of our own people pinning their faith in meetings instead of depending upon organisation;' and Regan, the Glasgow organiser, referred to the want of enthusiasm and energy on the part of many members of the Labour Movement. On the other hand the defeated candidate in Jordanhill, Rushworth, who was the Assistant Secretary of the Dyers and Bleachers, drew different conclusions: 'The loss of the seat was the strong inclination of the workers towards industrial action as they were beginning to despair of politics'. Even Regan was forced to conclude, 'the Glasgow Labour and socialist movement was under a cloud of depression as a result of the general election and also the failure of the 40 hour strike',⁽²⁾.

Two parliamentary by-elections in the first part of 1919, however, showed there had been a swing to the left on the part of the electorate. While Labour had been prevented from adopting new

2 Forward, June 14, 1919.

candidates in the last week of the election campaign in December 1918, there was a determination on the part of Scottish leaders in future to fight every seat if at all possible. The Party's National Executive was more cautious arguing seats be fought where 'substantial improvements' on general election performance could be gained⁽³⁾. But in Scotland the Executive were to fight every by-election between 1918 and 1922 with only four exceptions - the middle class seats of Glasgow Pollok and Edinburgh South; and the rural seats of Inverness and Moray and Nairn - and even when it failed to intervene in these, there was considerable resentment within the Scottish Party that no candidature was pursued. The first by-election of the new Parliament came in perhaps the most difficult territory possible, Central Aberdeenshire, a constituency which was predominantly rural, with a large number of small villages, and little history of Labour organisation. In pursuit more of new members, than of electoral victory, Labour adopted Joseph Duncan, Secretary of the Scottish Farm Servants Union, who claimed that during 1918 and 1919 his membership was increasing at the rate of one thousand monthly⁽⁴⁾. With a national organiser, Egerton Wake, as agent, the party managed to form local committees in at least a dozen of the constituency's small villages, and Duncan argued that he was recruiting life-long Liberals to the party's membership⁽⁵⁾.

3 Labour Party, National Executive, Organisations and Elections Sub Committee February 4, 1919. One further proviso about contests was that adequate money and organisation be secured locally and that candidates should be of high calibre, with the Committee accepting that 'the experience of the recent election made the whole question now of the greatest importance'.

4 Forward, March 29, 1919.

5 Ibid. April 19, 1919.

Labour's vote in the by-election was the best it was to receive in the constituency in the interwar years. While the independent Liberal, Wood, was a radical, 'who would not tolerate anything of the nature of profiteering in land', Labour managed to secure just under 3,500 votes - or 26.4% - of the vote, although it was bottom of the poll⁽⁶⁾. Wake reported to the National Executive that 'a surprisingly good vote had been achieved despite the difficult circumstances' and while he attributed much of the success to 'the admirable qualities of the candidate',⁽⁷⁾ Forward argued that the performance was 'sufficiently encouraging to justify us in fighting every rural constituency in Scotland',⁽⁸⁾.

The Bothwell by-election of July 1919 showed how far Labour's electoral prospects had been transformed in the early months of 1919, and at the same time represented one further step in the shift from industrial to political action during 1919. While the Glasgow Herald claimed that the election presented a choice between 'Mr Smillie and the Triple Alliance, and the British Parliament', the reality was rather different⁽⁹⁾. For the Labour candidate, John Robertson, the key questions were 'housing and the necessity for the nationalisation of the mines' and his preference was for parliamentary, rather than industrial, means of achieving these⁽¹⁰⁾.

6 The election result was: M Wood (Lib.), 4,950; L Davidson, (Coal.Con.), 4,764; J Duncan (Lab.) 3,482. Both Conservative and Liberal votes declined despite a higher poll and Labour's share of the vote - 26.4% - was never surpassed in the interwar years and only marginally improved upon - 26.6% - in the 1945 election.

7 Labour Party Scottish Executive Minutes, May 5, 1919.

8 Forward, May 10, 1919.

9 Glasgow Herald, July 9, 1919.

10 Ibid, July 8, 1919: Forward, July 5, 1919.

Robertson's opponent was a Liberal standing as a Coalitionist who opposed nationalisation⁽¹¹⁾. Irish affairs were a complicating factor and the Coalition supporters included leading members of the Orange Order who were estimated to be 5,000 in number. According to the Orange Order District Master, miners would vote Coalition because of the Ulster issue, or at least abstain, since, in his view, 'between nationalisation and the interests of Ulster...Ulster would come first'⁽¹²⁾. But Moffat, the Coalition candidate, proved to favour self-government as long as Ulster's rights were provided for and while Forward argued the Irish Protestants' vote was in disarray, the United Irish League, which favoured self determination for Ireland as a whole, was pledged to Robertson⁽¹³⁾.

The Irish issue was insufficient to divert attention from the major question of the election, attitudes to nationalisation of the mines. The mining vote exceeded 10,000 and some thought it nearer 15,000 in a constituency with nearly 27,000 electors on the register. Robertson's campaign stressed nationalisation, asking miners if they were going to 'Blackleg' by voting for Moffat who was a coalmaster⁽¹⁴⁾. The result was a 20% swing towards Labour from the Coalition, with a Coalition majority of 332 in 1918 converted into a Labour majority which exceeded 7,000. Without a major increase on the poll of December 1918 - only 2% more voted - Labour received more than two thirds of the vote. After the results, the Scotsman, was careful to distinguish Bolshevism and moderate socialism, arguing it had 'not heard the epithet Bolshevik applied to any of these advocating the labour principles'⁽¹⁵⁾.

11 Ibid, July 4, 1919.

12 Ibid, July 9, 1919.

13 Forward, July 12, 1919.

14 Scotsman, July 16, 1919.

15 Scotsman, July 16, 1919.

Even Forward was to admit that while, amongst miners there was a 'growing consciousness of their position as a class', it would be idle to pretend it was a vote for socialism or even 'a keen class conscious vote',⁽¹⁶⁾.

Labour's important breakthrough came with the local elections of 1919, when they gained more seats than any other party has won in a single year in Scottish local elections. Labour stood on a municipal programme which concentrated on the housing question but also argued for municipal milk, insurance, entertainment facilities, food production and savings banks. It also argued for public works and better health care, including infant welfare centres⁽¹⁷⁾. When the full results were totalled, the party had made 280 gains, including burgh and county council, and parish council, representation. The party took control in Kilmarnock and Kirkintilloch. In other places, such as Kilsyth, Cowdenbeath, and Bo'ness, they won every ward they fought. In Glasgow they made startling gains, winning 24 seats⁽¹⁸⁾. In Aberdeen, the party which had originally wanted to contest every seat won five of the six wards in which it stood⁽¹⁹⁾. Forward concluded:

Go over these results as a whole and you will find an amazing record of success, wherever there is steady ILP propaganda and where there has been any pretence of organisation.⁽²⁰⁾

16 Forward, August 9, 1919. The full result of the by-election was J Robertson (Lab.), 13,135; J Moffat (Coal.Lib.), 5,967. In 1918 the result had been, D MacDonald, (Coal.Con.), 9,359; J Robertson (Lab.), 9,027.

17 Forward, October 11, 1919.

18 Forward, November 15, 1919.

19 Phipps, op.cit. p.174. Two other candidates later joined the new Labour Group.

20 Forward, November 15, 1919.

In the later part of 1919 and early 1920, however, Labour felt its position handicapped by the presence of extremists within the party on the one hand, and by the ineffectiveness of the Labour Parliamentary opposition in the House of Commons on the other⁽²¹⁾. In 1920, the party was also to be hampered by the 'Coalition' tactics amongst the right wing parties, which, in the Paisley by-election campaign, saw the Conservatives desert their own party even for Asquith in an attempt to retain a united front against Labour. Labour's candidate in the by-election was a Co-operative nominee, Biggar, who was an ILP member but insufficiently radical to prevent the Socialist Labour Party considering placing a candidate in the field⁽²²⁾. While Biggar received the United Irish League's support and it was generally believed Asquith had an uphill fight on his hands, Conservatives like Lord Robert Cecil gave their support to Asquith. Forward believed that Labour did not win the seat because of Labour's poor record in the House of Commons and a popular reaction against more militant elements associated with the Labour Party⁽²³⁾. But the main reason for Asquith's victory was the defection of Tories to Liberals. While the Labour vote increased by more than 4,000, and Labour's share of the vote rose to 39% as against 34% in the 1918 general election, the Conservative candidate lost his deposit. Thus while Ramsay Macdonald believed the contest showed that Labour had emphasised 'its distinctiveness from other parties', Forward predicted that, with Tories now supporting Liberals, there would be a split within the Liberal Party, and radicals would join Labour⁽²⁴⁾.

21 Forward, January 31, 1920.

22 As early as May, Forward complained the Liberals were seen as the best alternatives to the coalition because 'The Labour Party has not risen to the opportunities the session has presented', May 10, 1919.

23 Ibid, February 7, 1920.

24 Ibid, March 13, 1920. The result was Asquith (Lib.), 14,736; Biggar (Lab.Co-op.), 11,902; and McKean, (Coal.Con.), 2,705.

Labour could also derive some comfort from or excuse for their defeat in other by-elections in 1920. The Scottish Divisional Council of the ILP was to be severely criticised for the way it handled the Argyllshire by-election in March. With decisions on fighting the election made only by the Parliamentary Committee, the Glasgow ILP threatened to disaffiliate⁽²⁵⁾. Two Labour candidates were considered - the former Liberal, Dundas White, and the Rev. M McCallum⁽²⁶⁾. McCallum who was chosen, had left the Liberal Party over its small-holding proposals and was both the Chairman of his local parish council in Argyll and a member of the local education authority. His programme, if not full-blooded socialism, was radical - home rule, higher pensions, nationalisation of monopolies, and community ownership of land⁽²⁷⁾. Maxton, Stewart, and other ILP propagandists went North⁽²⁸⁾, and new branches were formed. When the results were announced, the Labour vote had doubled on its 1918 performance, with the Coalition majority halved. The prediction from Forward was that it was a seat Labour could win in future⁽²⁹⁾.

Labour made less impact in the two by-elections in Edinburgh not least because of local splits within the movement. While Maxton was originally chosen as the candidate for North Edinburgh, his Bridgeton party would not release him for the fight.⁽³⁰⁾ Instead, the local Labour Party chose Graham Pole, who failed to win the

25 Glasgow ILP Executive, March 19, 1920.

26 Forward, February 21, 1920.

27 Ibid., February 28.

28 Ibid. March 6, and 13, 1920.

29 Ibid., March 20, 1920. The result was: E Sutherland (Coal.Lib.) 10,187; M McCallum (Lab.), 5,498. Labour's share of the vote was twice as high as during the general election of 1918 and although it was secured in a two party contest without Conservative intervention, the party was never to secure a higher share in the interwar years or even in 1945.

30 Forward, April, 3 1920.

endorsement of the local militant shop stewards committee who issued their own pre-soviet manifesto. Labour did not fight in South Edinburgh. With Edinburgh a Liberal centre, Forward had felt it 'absolutely necessary' to contest at least one of the seats but the only comfort the party took was that their intervention had prevented any Liberal revival⁽³¹⁾.

- 31 Forward, April 17, 1920. The election result was P Ford (Coal.Con.), 9,944; W Runciman (Lib.), 8,469; D G Pole, (Lab.), 3,808. In Edinburgh South, the Coalition Conservatives held on to their seat.

IV THE CONSOLIDATION OF POLITICAL ACTION

The early months of 1920 were the days before the cement finally set. In his fortnightly reports, Sir Basil Thomson expressed alarm that Scotland was moving leftwards:

There is abundant evidence that the great mass of Labour is steadily shifting to the left. One sign is the increased membership of the ILP, which in Scotland is becoming more extremist in its propaganda.(1),

In fact during the first months of 1920 the left was divided over further strategy, with 'a tempest raging', as the Scottish Divisional Council of the ILP supported affiliation to the Third International against the advice of their national leadership. Even a motion to leave the Labour Party which had been proposed by six branches received 53 votes against 147. Patrick Dollan was one who was convinced that the ILP had not decided 'to abandon political action in order to concentrate on the methods of sovietism', but the decision in favour of the Third International had been taken against the advice of Maxton who saw it as 'a lazy means of escape from a serious problem' and Wheatley who railed against 'unfortunate divisions on the threshold of a great national triumph'. Maxton felt it quite wrong to suggest that the British Labour Movement was 'ready for revolution along Russian lines' (2).

The Third International vote in January 1920 was the high watermark for the non-parliamentary left however, and during 1920 the left could make little headway. A further 'unity' conference which

1 Fortnightly Report, February 1920, 'Cabinet Papers, Revolutionary Organisations in the UK'.

2 Forward, January 10, 1920.

tried to bring together the British Socialist Party, the Socialist Labour Party and the ILP failed, after the SLP demanded the ILP leave the Labour Party. At the same time John Maclean was moving further from the mainstream, arguing for a general strike against unemployment and increasingly of the view that Scotland should go its own way. When the Communist Party was eventually formed during the negotiations of 1920 it could make little headway amongst the traditional elements of the Labour Movement in Scotland. While a group of ILPers - the ILP left wing Movement led by Mrs Helen Crawford, defected to the Communist Party - other left wing groups remained outside, such as John Maclean's supporters, the leadership of the Socialist Labour Party and some leaders of the shop stewards' movement (who were pursuing their own strategy for social committees in communities to rebuild where factory committees were being crushed). Indeed in the summer of 1920 there was an attempt to form a Scottish Communist Party around Maclean, the Glasgow BSP, the rump of the SLP and several ILPers, as a soviet party committed to the Third International but also, unlike the new Communist Party, with a policy of total independence from the Labour Party. But it did not get far.

The Communist Party was formed in July 1920 as unemployment began to hit Scotland - and much of the post-war industrial militancy had evaporated as unions made concessions and the Labour Party and TUC reasserted their authority. One writer, Walter Kendall has argued that what he sees as a Russian imposition of a Communist Party in 1920 was 'a betrayal of the growing revolutionary movement at a time when this tradition showed signs of breaking out of its sectarian isolation', and he suggests that the key leader was Maclean whose influence, he argues, was at its peak in 1920 and 1921:

The objective effects of the formation of the Communist Party was to destroy a previous socialist tradition which whilst imperfect showed every sign of developing towards more realistic and effective forms.(3)

3 W Kendall, The Revolutionary Movement in Britain, 1900-1921 (London, 1969), p.301.

But Maclean's influence was diminishing in the period. By late 1919 Maclean had come round to the strategic calculation that revolution, while impossible in England, could happen in Scotland, and inspired, and then deflated, by the turn of events in Ireland, he came out strongly for Scottish independence. In September 1920, Maclean argued:

I favour a Scottish Communist republic as the first stage to world communism with Glasgow as the head and centre...we can make Glasgow a Petrograd, a revolutionary storm centre.(4)

But this belief in the millenium on Clydeside arose from his sense of frustration that revolutionaries had already missed the boat in the rest of Britain. Yet by 1920 the same was true of Scotland. Maclean suffered not from paranoia, as those who opposed his decision not to join the Communist Party argued, but from a lack of working-class support. His importance was as a propagandist and educator, who was responsible for inspiring a generation of future socialists - and not as a revolutionary leader with an organised base of support.

For Maclean suffered, as the Communist Party was to suffer, from the containment of the revolutionaries during 1919 and 1920, as the official leaderships of the trade union and political sides of the Labour movement regained the initiative. Murphy who joined the Communist Party was to write in January 1920 that 'since the armistice unemployment had decimated the ranks of the unofficial movement.

4 N Milton, John Maclean, (London, 1973), p.243-4.

The forty hours strike was the last occasion on which the shop stewards initiated and played an important part in a great strike movement.(5)

As such the decision to form the Communist Party owed less to growing support for revolutionary action as a need to consolidate the declining support that was left. As Hinton and Hyman suggest 'it is perfectly clear that the only alternative to the formation of a CP in 1920-21 was the fragmentation and complete ineffectiveness of the revolutionary left'(6).

As the left outside the Labour Party argued amongst itself, from within John Wheatley made a forceful plea for uniting around Parliamentary action. In a speech, 'the Labour Party and its critics', he argued that even propaganda must take second place temporarily to organisation. The Labour Party he said should rely on the force of reason, brains not bullets.

When the majority wanted socialism they could take it and we had no right to impose socialism on them until they did want it...The issue was not the relative merits of socialism or parliament. What they wanted now was not the best plan for working socialism but for winning it.

Arguing that industrial action would yield only 'limited gains' as 'a palliative and no solution', he rejected any further concessions to the 'direct action' movement.

The policy of industrial action only meant peaceful starvation as a means of winning socialism or reliance on force. It assumed that people who did not want socialism would starve or die for it. If they did want it there is no need to do either.

5 Solidarity, January 1920.

6 J Hinton and R Hyman, op.cit., p.8.

From a different point of view in February 1920, Maxton also issued a strong plea for unity within the Labour Party, during what he called 'a testing time'. While he advocated 'full working-class control of the workshops under workers' control' and had done so for five years, he stated that there must be 'some organisation that could collect all the different opinions and embrace the different sections'. He did not want unity of opinion, he said, but without the ILP and the Labour Party there was a danger of 'going on the wrong lines'⁽⁷⁾.

In fact the challenge to the official Labour leaders who supported parliamentary action never materialised to any extent during 1920 in the way it had at the start of the interwar years. A call by John Maclean - supported by committees of the unemployed - for a general strike against unemployment came to little in February 1920 and the pressure to force the Government's hands over Russia was directed through official Labour channels. It was the STUC, backed up by the Labour Party which co-ordinated the Councils of Action Movement in Scotland. Their July congress in 1920 supported direct action on Ireland, Poland, and Russia, and on the cost of living and rents⁽⁸⁾. But as Julie Brotherston has pointed out:

The leadership nationally was at pains to emphasise the strictly constitutional nature of the councils. They were to be firmly based on local trades councils or Labour Party branches. Their prime duty was to act as centres of information for the national councils.⁽⁹⁾

7 Forward, February, 1920.

8 Scottish Trade Union Congress, Report of Special Congress, July 10, 1920, Annual Report, 1921.

9 A full account of the 'Councils of Action' is contained in J Brotherston, Internationalism and the Labour Movement 1917-1920, Edinburgh University M.Litt., 1979.

It was for example a joint Trades Council and Independent Labour Party rally that was held in Glasgow in August 1920 and speakers included Dollan, Macdonald and Wheatley⁽¹⁰⁾.

The Russian campaign demonstrated the leadership's ability to retain control of events by limiting action to pressure on one particular issue. The rent strike which was invoked in Scotland by the ILP and the STUC in July 1920 with the intention of using all possible weapons both industrial and political ultimately provided a similar demonstration⁽¹¹⁾. A rent strike had been a possibility from 1919. During the miners' agitation Smillie had said 'he would be prepared at any time to ask our people to declare a strike on the housing question'⁽¹²⁾. Although in August a proposal at the Labour Housing Conference for a ballot on a strike on the rent issue had been turned down, the Glasgow factors were near the mark when they had concluded that 'the end of the European war marks the beginning of the rent war'⁽¹³⁾. The pressure came from rises in the cost of living. In May 1920, 1,000 delegates at a Scottish Labour Housing Association Conference, at what Forward called 'perhaps the most representative conference of the Scottish Working class movement yet'⁽¹⁴⁾, decided to pay no rent,⁽¹⁵⁾ and while the

10 Forward, August 18, 25, 1920.

11 STUC Report of Special Congress, July 10, 1920.

12 Forward, April 26, 1919.

13 Glasgow Property Circular, October 8, 1918, quoted by M Englander, Scottish Labour History Society Journal, 15, 1981.

14 Forward, August 7, 1920

Parliamentary Labour Party opposed this action,⁽¹⁶⁾ Wheatley argued for defiance of the law⁽¹⁷⁾. The STUC organised a special conference, which resolved to have a 24 hour strike, and local demonstrations against high rents and to refuse to pay rent increases⁽¹⁸⁾. The ILP branches were asked to form rent strike committees⁽¹⁹⁾. A manifesto by Wheatley argued: 'in this fight we cannot fail. Not a single family will be evicted. Any attempt to arrest wages can be answered immediately by a general strike. Trade Unionism protects your wages, it will now determine rent and prices',⁽²⁰⁾.

The rent campaign formed part of Labour's strategy to capture the initiative in Scotland, through combining industrial and political action. As Forward remarked, 'The rent strike is not merely designed to save a few shillings from the annual house rent of every tenant. The rent strike is an indication of Labour's determination that an end must be put to the Government's policy of passing on the burden of the state to the poor and allowing the rich to escape',⁽²¹⁾. Reflecting dissatisfaction with price inflation, the Labour Party's Scottish executive argued 'no more crucial question requiring the fullest concentration and organisation of working class forces has arisen in this generation',⁽²²⁾. Initially, the campaign drew on considerable support with 100,000 attending a demonstration in Glasgow and 10,000

15 Ibid., May 28, 1920

16 Ibid., July 3, 1920

17 Ibid., June, 26, 1920

18 Ibid., August 7, 1920.

19 Ibid., August 14, 1920.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid., August 28, 1920.

22 Labour Party, Scottish Council, Executive Report, 1921.

in Edinburgh⁽²³⁾. The miners supported a one-day strike on August 27 and in Glasgow: 'its chief feature was a stoppage of the corporation's tramway..that the movement was entirely successful in these respects need not be questioned'⁽²⁴⁾. But the movement to withhold rent was only successful in limited areas. It seemed to fail badly in Fife and in the poorer areas of Glasgow. By September Forward had to convince itself that 'the rent strike is not dead'⁽²⁵⁾. But the strike had failed, as the STUC concluded, because 'the extraordinary scarcity of housing accommodation seemed to be too great for the maintenance... of solidarity, the people being too much afraid of being rendered homeless to continue their resistance for any length of time'⁽²⁶⁾. The rent strike was the last of a series of direct action measures which failed. In the early 1920s, industrial struggles were to be on industrial issues only. This was to be confirmed by the failure of the miners to win industrial success in their 1921 stoppage, as unemployment besieged the Scottish economy.

The 1920 municipal elections represented a consolidation of Labour's political strength. All the main newspapers used 'red scare tactics', with The Record urging people to 'rout the Reds today', and the Glasgow Herald later claiming its appeals had saved the city of Glasgow from socialism. According to Forward the position in Glasgow was that the Labour vote had increased by 30,000 over 2 years, which showed that 5 of the 15 Glasgow seats would be

23 Forward, August 28, 1920

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., September 11, 1920.

26 STUC Report, 1921, pp.38-39.

won at the election: "The present rate of progress is more dangerous to the existing order than would be a cataclysmic leap to power". In total 120,183 votes had been achieved in 30 Glasgow wards and Forward argued:

The parliamentary register is infinitely more favourable to Labour than the municipal register. Thousands of young men (and they are usually Labour supporters) are entitled to the Parliamentary vote on reaching 21 but are disenfranchised at the local poll through the absence of a property qualification. Again in the middle class parts of every ward there are large houses comprising young ladies who qualified for the municipal vote but who not being thirty years of age have no parliamentary vote...again in a parliamentary election we will be justified in counting on a large slice of the support that went to independent candidates of democratic and unofficial labour sympathies in several of the wards.(27)

The performance in 1920 was in fact more uneven than in 1919. In Falkirk Labour now had a majority in both Town and Parish Councils, but in Greenock results were 'indifferent' and in Fife Labour was suffering from 'a lack of discipline and organisation',⁽²⁸⁾. In Glasgow while the temperance issue was important - due to a poll for 'dry' and 'wet' areas - Forward argued Labour did well because it had 'succeeded in making housing the issue',⁽²⁹⁾. Traditional politics were to dominate the next two years - despite two major stoppages, a miners' strike and an engineers' lock-out.

27 Forward. November 13, 1920.

28 Forward, November 20, 1920.

29 Ibid.

Labour's electoral success continued into 1920 with victory in the Kirkcaldy by-election, even when there were difficulties. The choice of Kennedy as Labour candidate was not a popular one amongst left-wing activists. Although he was a former member of the Social Democratic Federation and later the British Socialist Party, he was regarded with suspicion for his attitudes to questions such as the nationalisation of the mines and he had opposed the ILPs anti-war attitudes. His lukewarm attitude to mines nationalisation was particularly embarrassing in view of the build-up of agitation amongst the miners in Fife at the time of the election. But as Forward wrote, 'let no one at a time like this seek division...the ILP policy is to do the utmost to secure a large Labour vote for the Labour candidate' ⁽³⁰⁾.

Kirkcaldy was also one of the few places in Scotland where there were no ILP branches and no women's organisations ⁽³¹⁾. Labour was to benefit by the support of the Irish vote but Lockhart, the Coalition Liberal candidate who stood with Conservative support, was probably right to attribute his defeat to the loss of the mining vote. The miners, he told the Scotsman, had voted Labour to fight off the threat of lower wages. ⁽³²⁾

The 1921 Scottish ILP Conference reversed the support for direct action and the Third International which had characterised the decisions of 1920. ⁽³³⁾ At the Conference a 'soviet'

30 Forward, February 26, 1921.

31 Forward, March 9, 1921.

32 Scotsman, March 16, 1921. The results were: T Kennedy, (Lab.), 11,674; R Lockhart (Coal.Lib.), 10,199. The seat had been uncontested in 1918.

33 Forward, January 8, 1921. .

motion for workers control won only a handful of votes and was rejected in favour of a Cole-style guild socialist approach to industrial democracy which recognised that 'the source of authority must be the whole body of citizens'. Even an attempt to change 'citizens' to 'workers' was beaten down by 95 votes to 44, after Shinwell argued that 'attempts were being made to get the conference to accept camouflaged soviet resolutions'. In addition, the major source of previous contention - affiliation to the Third International - was resolved when conference rejected membership by 93 votes to 57⁽³⁴⁾.

Unity was the order of the day. Maxton welcomed the end to what he considered 'the waste of energy' involved in fruitless decisions on matters such as the Third International at a time when unemployment was growing⁽³⁵⁾. In fact most sections of the ILP and the Labour Party in Scotland also accepted that the miners' leader, Smillie, was right to oppose a general strike in favour of mines' nationalisation, believing that the proper course was political pressure to secure the election of a Labour Government committed to that measure. The 1921 STUC Congress was told by its Chairman that unions had: 'never been in favour of a general strike to enforce demands which have a political solution. The ballot box is the finest weapon the working-classes possess and it is only by an intelligent use of that weapon that they will be able to secure emancipation'⁽³⁶⁾. Nevertheless the failure of the Triple

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid. June 1921. Maxton argued, 'up till June of this year a huge amount of energy was wasted by the Labour Movement in Glasgow in fruitless decisions concerning the Internationals...We were only beginning to get into business when the heavy hand of unemployment laid its weight upon the workers'.

36 STUC Conference Report, 1921, p.61.

Alliance to act in defence of the miners provoked strong words, some arguing for a local Triple Alliance, others that the West of Scotland was 'solid' for a general strike and others suggesting that 'there would have been no Triple Alliance failure if the Scottish workers had been free to act by themselves'. But when it came to positive action, Congress voted only for financial assistance to the miners⁽³⁷⁾.

But the left was being hit by the growing recession. As early as January 1921 the ILP was confronted with evidence of falling party memberships. While ILP branches numbered 231 in Scotland, only 98 attended their 1921 Conference⁽³⁸⁾. If direct action was undermined by the attitude of Labour leaders, the growing threat of unemployment itself confirmed its rejection. By the middle of 1921 Scotland had been severely hit by recession, and from then unemployment figures mounted, and increasing pressure on poor law authorities forced changes in government regulations which proscribed assistance to the able-bodied unemployed. The destitute able-bodied receiving poor relief jumped from 1,000 in May 1921 to 32,000 in September and reached more than 100,000 in January 1922.

In October 1921 the Government looking into 'unemployment and distress in Scotland' found that:

So far as industrial Scotland is concerned the position is one of almost unrelieved blackness...Almost all employers interviewed took a very pessimistic view of the future...In duration and numbers involved, mining, steel and iron working are the worst, and the position is accentuated by the fact that in areas where these occupations are followed there are few other industries

37 Ibid. p.64-65.

38 Forward, January 8, 1921. The ILP Chairman had to concede that 'the purchase of membership cards indicated a fall in membership'. While 98 branches were represented in 1921, even less - 67 - were to attend in 1922 and the ILP's Scottish Report of 1920-21 found that 'unemployment had affected membership' Forward, April 30, 1921.

of substantial dimensions. The coal mining areas come nearest to single occupation groups...it is estimated that roundabout 25,000 men employed recently in coal mining in Scotland are in excess of the capacity of the mines to absorb them for some years to come.(39)

The report agreed that 'as resources diminish and distress becomes more acute...particular areas will have to be very carefully watched'(40). Fife, Lanark and Glasgow were the worrying areas.

Some idea of the scale of falling membership can be gleaned from the membership figures of some of the largest unions.

TABLE 2.1

Trade Union Membership 1920-23

	000's			
	1920	1921	1922	1923
ASE (Engineers)	52.3	50.8	40.0	25.0
AS Woodworkers			16.5	13.9
Jute and Flax	14.0			11.4
NUGW (General Workers)	37.6	19.8	13.7	13.0
Shop Assistants Union	14.0	10.0	10.0	11.0
NUR (Railwaymen)	43.5	35.8	32.9	35.7
Miners	75.0	-	35.0	50.0
Horse & Motormen's Union		15.0	13.3	13.1

Ten of the larger unions had experienced between them a 35% fall in membership between 1920 and 1923⁽⁴¹⁾.

39 Scottish Board of Health, Memorandum on Unemployment and Distress in Scotland, SRO, HH 31/36/1. p.2-3.

40 Ibid. p.7.

41 Figures compiled from E Kebblewhite, op.cit. Appendix One.

Industrially, the Labour Movement was to become extremely weak, as membership of trade unions fell with rising unemployment and as demoralisation set in. STUC affiliation was only 226,822 in 1922 and 250,949 in 1923,⁽⁴²⁾ and industrial activity was now confined to defensive purposes. As Hinton and Hyman have suggested:

The appearance of industrial militancy in the 1920's is in many ways misleading. From the onset of the depression the number of stoppages recorded in each year averaged some 500 - only half the level of the previous decade. What pushed up the totals of strike days was the occurrence of an unprecedented number of large scale and protracted stoppages, often involving whole industries and they were invariably defensive in character. (43)

In these circumstances the miners' strike of 1921 was a defensive battle for protecting living standards. While two special Trade Union Congresses of December 1919 and March 1920 had supported nationalising the mines, the eventual upshot 'The Mines for the Nation' campaign, which was an alternative to direct action, had little impact. By the middle of 1920 the miners needed help to fight wage cuts, rather than support for nationalisation. While the Triple Alliance failed to work, support for the miners united the Labour Movement in Scotland when they went on strike in April 1921, as Ramsay Macdonald accused the Government of fomenting 'civil war',⁽⁴⁴⁾ and the Scottish ILP urged its members to set up local committees and Councils of Action in support of the miners⁽⁴⁵⁾.

42 STUC Report, 1925, p.70-71.

43 J Hinton and R Hyman, op.cit., p.17.

44 Forward, April 30, 1921.

45 Forward, April 16, 1921. The miners later acknowledged the ILP's help. Through rallies and collections, nearly £800 was collected in Glasgow alone. Forward, May 28, June 4, July 23, 1921.

Smillie was later to tell the miners' conference that their strike had been 'a defensive one'. This was despite the growth of an unofficial rank and file movement within the mining community⁽⁴⁶⁾. Among the rank and file of the miners a movement that had begun in 1919 during the industrial action and taken root in 1920, argued for full control over union officials, one union for Scotland and a five day week. By the time of the 1921 strike it was organised at a Scottish and British level and 'a rebel miners group' existed in every district⁽⁴⁷⁾. But in spite of the rank and file militancy which was to develop during the twenties, the miners were to be comprehensively beaten, Smillie admitting that their forces had been 'shattered'⁽⁴⁸⁾. By 1922, the miners' affiliation to their own Scottish conferences had fallen from 114,250 to 66,050⁽⁴⁹⁾.

While the rank and file movements which opposed the Labour Party remained in being, the defeat of the miners confirmed the drift to parliamentary action. The lessons the Labour Party sought to draw were clear. For Forward, the struggle had now moved 'from the industrial field to the political field'. In an article, 'The Lessons the Colliers have learned', Forward argued that the miners now had to send their best men into Parliament. Citing Smillie who was alleged to have said the miners were beaten as far back as the 1918 election, it argued, 'the colliers are learning the unwisdom of leaving political power to the master class - learning it in sorrow and in anguish'⁽⁵⁰⁾. But the lessons of the miners' strike merely confirmed what the main drift of opinion within the miners' unions themselves had been for some time. In February 1921, before the strike, Small, the Lanarkshire Miners Secretary, reported to his union the conclusions of a special Labour Party conference on

46 Forward, November 27, 1920.

47 Ibid., April 9, 1921.

48 Ibid., August 12, 1921.

49 National Union of Mineworkers, Organisation Committee, October 2, 1922.

50 Forward, July 16, 1921.

unemployment. The conclusions of their discussion were that 'direct action was not a helpful proposition', with the only remedy to strengthen political organisation to support the return to Parliament of Labour Party candidates. 'Political action', it was concluded, 'was the only feasible course to adopt'⁽⁵¹⁾.

The shift can be seen in the attitude of the Glasgow ILP Federation which as Chapter One records had been debating 'soviets' in 1917-18. When in 1921 the Federation was approached by John Maclean who asked the ILP 'to focus on the general strike as a means of enforcing maintenance or work for the unemployed and to prevent a general fall in wages', the Federation took no action. The Minutes record that 'after a general discussion...the previous question was carried, leaving the matter open for further consideration, by 25 to 21'⁽⁵²⁾. The party had in fact told its delegates to the Glasgow Unemployed Committee that 'they should refrain from any action should the question of a general strike on the unemployment question be raised'⁽⁵³⁾. The party went on to support the disbandment of the unemployed committee and 'the taking over of the work by the Trades Council', and further that the branches should discourage disruptive propaganda on their platforms⁽⁵⁴⁾.

51 Lanarkshire County Miners Union Executive, February 26, 1921.

52 Glasgow ILP Executive, November 29, 1918.

53 Ibid, February 4, 1921.

53 Ibid., February 18, 1921.

IV LABOUR ORGANISATION

As the pendulum swung further towards faith in traditional political methods, the omens for success for Labour were uncertain. Membership of the ILP in Scotland was falling and in the 1921 municipal elections, the party lost its impetus. Unemployment far from radicalising the poorest sections of the population seemed to be immobilising them, as the poll in the Glasgow elections fell by 16%. The position was repeated throughout the country, and was not helped by splits within the Labour ranks over Communist interventions at the polls. But the lesson which the ILP leaders in Scotland took from the results was that 'destitution, hunger and unemployment are not aids to the Labour cause and even in the mining areas where if anything the iron has been thrust into the soul of the workers, one found the old inability to connect living conditions with votes cast for legislation and administrative representatives'⁽¹⁾. As unemployment continued to rise, one third of ILP members were said to be unable to pay their contributions and indeed the party appealed for help from middle class sympathisers⁽²⁾.

The Labour Party began to mount a campaign to change the regulations and administration of the poor law in Scotland as relief funds were drying up and the miners' strike of 1921 raised new questions of 'eligibility'. It was naturally led on to formulate a policy on relief in the aftermath of the changes. In particular it organised a conference of parish councillors and others which demanded a relief scale of £1 a week for adults and thirty shillings for married couples, and that education authorities should be responsible for providing children's meals seven days a week⁽³⁾. It was probably in this area alone between

1 Forward, October 8, 1921.

2 Ibid., October 15, 1921.

3 Report of Labour Party Conference of Scottish Labour representatives on public bodies contained in Scottish Executive Papers, 24 September 1921.

1918 and 1922 that the Labour Party - as distinct from the ILP, the STUC and other bodies - took a leading role, with the Scottish Executive leading the way in March 1922 with its manifesto for adequate maintenance or work for the unemployed.

From 1920 onwards, the propaganda effort of the Labour Party in Scotland concentrated on the basic question of maintenance for the out-of-work. The extension of unemployment insurance under the 1920 Act and its later modification provided some protection to the unemployed but the poor law was the final safety net, even more so in Scotland than in the rest of Britain. This was true even before the formal removal of the legal powers which excluded the parish authorities from aiding the able-bodied unemployed. As the Scottish Board of Health report for 1920 stated, 'the year has shown especially in industrial parishes an exceptional increase in the numbers of ordinary poor...the proportion of these in receipt of relief from the parish council funds to the total population had in a number of areas reached a grave figure'⁽⁴⁾. As Levitt has shown, the pressure on government authorities was such that in April 1921 the Scottish Office had led the rest of Britain during the miners' strike by allowing the Poor Law authorities to assist the families of strikers despite the formal legal restriction. The Board of Health, themselves, admitted that they 'had gone a long way from the strict legal position out of sympathy with the people who were suffering'. At first loans were sanctioned, then relief to the miners, before finally assistance to the able-bodied was given legal authority. By the end of 1921, formal legal constraints on granting outdoor relief to the unemployed had also been removed and in September the parish councils agreed on a uniform relief scale. Only two Labour-Communist controlled authorities, Bonhill and Old Kirkpatrick went above it and both were later brought into line by the threat of surcharge⁽⁵⁾.

4 Report of Scottish Board of Health, 1920, p.211-213.

5 I Levitt, 'Unemployment and the Poor Law,' in T Smout (ed), op.cit., p.274.

Under pressure from local communities, and the parties to the left, the Labour Party in Scotland took the initiative in a campaign to change the regulations and administration of the poor law, as relief funds were drying up. It was led on to formulate a policy on relief, and in particular it organised a conference of parish councillors which demanded a minimum relief scale of £1 a week for adults, and thirty shillings for married couples. It also argued that education authorities should be responsible for providing childrens meals seven days a week. In March 1922, the Scottish Executive of the party which made the relief campaign a central activity issued a manifesto arguing for adequate maintenance or work for the unemployed(6).

Growing poverty and unemployment merely confirmed the swing from industrial to political action and the ILP and the Labour Party and even the trade unions placed almost all their hopes for improved conditions on electoral success. The main business of the Labour Party's Scottish Council it said was 'the securing of the parliamentary representation of Labour in Scotland'. By 1920, there were in addition to the Labour MPs twenty-one parliamentary candidates already adopted, making Labour ready for an election in just under thirty of Scotland's constituencies⁽⁷⁾. By 1921 there were thirty-six parliamentary candidates in all in the field and the party claimed that it now had divisional labour parties in all but eight of Scotland's seventy constituencies (Dundee, being a two member seat)⁽⁸⁾.

Labour's support came from defensive struggles for unemployment relief and against bad housing and evictions as the revolutionary euphoria of 1919 gave way to a populist-style strategy for local and national politics.

6 Labour Party Scottish Council, Report of Conference of Representatives on Public Bodies, September 24, 1921.

7 See Labour Party, Scottish Council, Executive Report, 1920.

8 Ibid., Executive Report, 1921.

But although the Labour Party seemed able to field candidates in a future election, it was not as well prepared as it might have been in other respects. Finance was its major problem. Throughout the period two forces were at work - the National Executive of the party attempting to gain more control over the Scottish organisation, and the Scottish Executive attempting to develop a more centralised and efficient organisation of the Scottish constituencies. In 1919 and 1920, the Scottish Executive attempted to constitute a special election fund for 'a centralised Scottish effort', but as the Executive heard in April 1920 the replies they received were 'few and otherwise discouraging, only two societies replying in a really encouraging manner'⁽⁹⁾. The party had no better luck in pursuing the question of trade union affiliations to local Labour Parties. The importance of trade union financial support for local parties was stressed by the executive in an appeal to conference in 1920, discouraging parliamentary candidates where little groundwork had been done:

It is surely not too much to expect that 25% of the levy should be returned to the branches for the purpose of building up the necessary organisation to secure the election of Labour representatives to local governing bodies and Parliament. It is pennywise and pound foolish to spend huge sums of money ranging from £700 to £1000 or more on a parliamentary contest in which Labour is bound to be defeated simply because a few more pounds have not been devoted beforehand to the building up of the necessary local machinery. Besides in most constituencies it is essential that the seats on local government bodies should be largely captured by Labour before triumphant headway can be made with the organisation of the parliamentary vote.⁽¹⁰⁾

But even before the full impact of the recession hit finances harder, the party had to admit that 'it becomes clear that the local labour parties will require to depend upon their own efforts for finance'⁽¹¹⁾.

9 Ibid.

10 Labour Party, Scottish Council, Executive Report, 1920.

11 Ibid.

A sign of the depression within the movement can be seen from what was happening in Ayrshire. With the miners' strike, and the rise of unemployment, Labour was unable to field any substantial number of candidates in local elections in 1921 and in almost all cases they were defeated. There was also an acute shortage of funds, as trade union membership fell⁽¹²⁾. Political meetings excited small audiences, and it forced, as Trevis suggests from her study of the Independent Labour Party in Ayrshire, the local ILP branches to leave an increasing number of issues 'on the table', or decide to take 'no action'⁽¹³⁾.

Roxburgh and Selkirk were one constituency which was insufficiently well organised or financed to be able to produce a candidate, despite the possibility of a by-election just before the 1922 General Election was declared. In 1920 a year after the constituency party was formed the party had been so ambitious that its suggested candidates included Philip Snowden and Margaret Bonfield⁽¹⁴⁾. But the constituency's major branch, Hawick, which had been active through 1919 fell away and had to be completely resuscitated in March 1922 and as far as the divisional labour party was concerned 'they had had no meetings of the divisional party for two years'⁽¹⁵⁾. While they were optimistic that if a strong candidate would be found their chances in a by-election were 'very good',⁽¹⁶⁾ their eventual choice - George Mathers of the Railway Clerks Association - was refused sponsorship by his union after his nomination and stood down.⁽¹⁷⁾ As the Minutes record: 'this had

12 Trevis, op.cit., p.189-191.

13 Ibid., p.189. ASE membership fell from more 2,000 to only 763 from 1920 to 1926.

14 Hawick Labour Party, February 16, 1920 and March 22, 1920.

15 Ibid. March 18, 1922.

16 Ibid., July 4, 1922.

17 Ibid., September 26, 1922.

meant the loss of valuable time and with only a week between this and nomination day we were unable to make a fight of it⁽¹⁸⁾.

From 1918 onwards the National Labour Party was attempting, as McKibbin has shown, to centralise its organisation on London and the party regarded the special status of the Scottish Executive not as a matter of pride but as a matter of regret and at times a hindrance. Headquarters argued as early as November 1919 that an organisational scheme should be devised 'to bring the whole country into direct touch with the staff, to ensure periodical visitation, consultation, inspection, and report, and bring every part of the country under the special charge of a chief agent with a responsible official in each area'. Thus the national organisers could argue that Wales was in a much more satisfactory position because it was under Headquarters control, whereas there was dissatisfaction with the position of the Scottish Advisory Council.⁽¹⁹⁾

But between 1919 and 1922 the rural areas posed special problems for the Labour Party, as it sought to develop and extend its organisation. A radical tradition did exist in the Highlands, exhibited not least in the land raids which followed the war.⁽²⁰⁾

18 Ibid., December 5, 1922. Mathers had only been selected in October. While the constituency decided in December 1922 'now was the time to prepare for the next election', they did not adopt their candidate for 1923 until August 1923, and found that they were short of finance for a campaign. (Hawick Labour Party, August 21, 1923 and November 2, 1923.

19 Report of National Organisers, Labour Party National Executive, November 11, 1919.

20 J Hunter, The Making of the Crofting Community, (Edinburgh, 1976), provides an account of Highland land protests.

The main impetus for Labour came initially from the Highland Land League. While Joseph Duncan had argued that Highland Labour organisation could only develop from the activities of trade unions like his own, the Farm Servants Union, the Highland Land League had in 1918 claimed to represent Highland radical opinion⁽²¹⁾. Trade Union leaders as prominent as Robert Smillie accepted the case for Highland Land League support by the Labour Party if the HLL agreed to self-government, land nationalisation, and the extension of the Scottish culture. In 1918 the electoral agreement which was accepted brought Labour support for five Highland Land League candidates, despite the opposition of Duncan, and a joint programme was issued. But Duncan's point was taken immediately after the election, with the Executive reporting in 1919: that the Highland Land League was 'the shadow of what it once was and had little or no prospect of effective revival'. The report argued that the majority of the League's membership, which was only 500 was not even in the Highlands. Thus the Executive recommended that 'the only chance of self-betterment by political means of the conditions of the workers in the Highlands lies in their organisation on the lines of the Labour Party constitution'; the basis would be 'a list of close upon 100 branches of trade unions practically all of which are affiliated to the National Labour Party in the four Highland divisions alone'⁽²²⁾. It was Duncan in particular who continued a vehement opposition to the Highland Land League. From then most of the Highland activity came from the Highland Labour Party based in Glasgow and from the occasional incursions of the ILP into what they called 'the backward areas'⁽²³⁾.

21 J Smith, Joseph Duncan, (Edinburgh University, 1976).

22 Labour Party Scottish Executive, Report, 1919.

23 Labour Party, Scottish Executive Committee, September 20, 1919.

In practice the only two forces that concentrated finance and organisation on Parliamentary candidates were the two groups that had been engulfed by the militancy of the immediate post-war years - the ILP and the miners' union. From 1918 onwards the miners were to place a disproportionate amount of their resources into the attempt to secure parliamentary representation. During the 1918 election they had four full time miners' organisers in the seats they contested⁽²⁴⁾. After the election, the Scottish miners adopted a comprehensive policy to increase their representation and their organisation in parliamentary constituencies. By the time of the Bothwell election, which was gained for the miners, there were five full time organisers⁽²⁵⁾. And even with four MPs after the Bothwell victory, and an acknowledged right to contest seats they had fought previously, the miners tried to secure additional candidatures, in Kilmarnock and Stirling and Falkirk Burghs and in Rutherglen where mining was only one of many industries⁽²⁶⁾.

24 Scottish Mineworkers Union, Executive, May 21, 1920. Political Committee, May 26, 1920; Executive, February 18, 1921.

25 Labour Party, National Executive Committee, Report of National Organisers, October 7 - November 11, 1921.

26 Ibid., Executive, February 18, 1921.

Smillie was one of a number of Scots miners' leaders who were to become totally committed to parliamentary representation as the major strategy for securing mines' nationalisation and other reforms. Speaking in October 1919 he had argued that: 'if patience and forbearance were exercised, the Government would be defeated and have to appeal to the country. The electors could then turn them out of office and return to parliament the men they desired to form the government they wanted'⁽²⁷⁾. Under a national system for allocating parliamentary candidates by numbers of affiliated members, the British mineworkers' executive considered the Scottish miners to be entitled to seven candidatures. But in Scotland the miners' unions in many areas supplemented the standard political levy by a voluntary additional levy, with the aim of placing more candidates in the field. In addition, the miners preferred to assign their political fund directly to particular candidates rather than paying dues across the board to local constituency parties. Thus, the miners of Lothian decided in 1921 that they wished to fight both South Midlothian and North Midlothian constituencies, and because this would increase the miners' national candidatures beyond the seven allocated, it was decided that South Midlothian be fought as a Miners Federation responsibility and that North Midlothian be fought as a purely Scottish responsibility. In fact, Labour's National Executive had recognised as early as the autumn of 1919 the right of the miners to contest ten constituencies in Scotland. The National Organisers' survey of the political organisation in Scotland had expressed satisfaction that four miners' organisers were cultivating ten constituencies for a future election⁽²⁸⁾.

In many places the miners were the Labour Party, and an example of their power can be seen in the formation and development of a

27 Forward, October 4, 1919.

28 Labour Party, National Executive Committee, Report of Work of National Organisers, October 7 - November 11, 1919.

constituency party such as South Midlothian and Peebles. Although there had been a miners' candidate in the 1918 general election, the constituency party was only formed after a decision by the miners in June 1919 and with a miner as the first Chairman. The first meeting passed a resolution urging the Scottish miners to contest the seat.⁽²⁹⁾ From the miners came a promise that if this was agreed, there would be an organiser, probably a full time one⁽³⁰⁾. With first James Gold, a Miner, and then Joseph Westwood, the miners' organiser, as the candidate, the only problem proved to be whether the British or Scottish miners should accept the financial responsibility for the seat⁽³¹⁾. Constituencies such as South Midlothian amply justify the statement Westwood was later to make that 'in places where there was no local Labour Parties but where a miners' branch existed, the miners' branch functioned as a local Labour Party'⁽³²⁾.

With five full time organisers in the field, there is no doubt that miners constituencies were far better organised than others. A survey carried out by the Scottish Miners' Executive in 1921 had on the whole expressed satisfaction with the state of organisation. Dunfermline it was reported, was 'in good organised condition' and West Fife 'well organised and in good condition'. South Midlothian had made 'good headway in organisation with the exception of one or two districts'. Hamilton was 'in a very good position all over the constituency' and the miners' presence was fully established in Bothwell, Falkirk and Stirling, North Lanark, South and North Ayr and Kilmarnock, making eleven seats in all that the miners were cultivating⁽³³⁾.

29 Peebles and South Midlothian DLP Minutes, June 7, 1919.

30 Special Conference, January 24, 1920.

31 Ibid., February 26, 1921.

32 Scottish Mineworkers Union, Executive, February 20, 1926.

33 Ibid., Executive, August 1, 1921.

However, by the end of 1921 and during 1922, the depression reduced the finance available for political purposes and this was to be accentuated by the political splits which were developing within the union. In Lanarkshire where the miners had acted on their own initiative in fighting political campaigns since the 1880's the position became serious. The Lanarkshire Miners who had been paying constituency affiliation fees as well as expenses to candidates and councillors attending council meetings had decided to cut their financial commitments to candidates at local elections and declined, as previously, to pay their constituency affiliation payments in advance⁽³⁴⁾. But even so, the Lanarkshire miners were prepared to consider additional parliamentary candidates. After Motherwell Trades and Labour Council sent a deputation requesting James Welsh, the Vice-Chairman of the Lanarkshire miners, as a candidate, in Motherwell, the union agreed to petition the national union for permission to run two additional miners' candidates for Scotland including Motherwell⁽³⁵⁾. This appeal was unsuccessful and prior to the election of 1922, finances were so tight that the Lanarkshire miners had to consider withdrawing two of their sponsored parliamentary candidates⁽³⁶⁾.

In addition to the miners, the Independent Labour Party were the other major force pursuing political representation throughout Scotland. From 1918 to 1920, Scotland had been the largest of ILP regions in Britain, its affiliation fees to the national organisation suggesting it had a membership of 30,000. But by 1921 with a 25% decrease in affiliation fees, its size was surpassed by

34 Lanarkshire Miners Union Political Sub Committee, March 10, 1922.

35 Lanarkshire Miners Union, Executive, November 9, 1922. Since August 1921, one of the problems was that the National Union of Scottish Mine Workers had been unable to contribute to the Lanarkshire fund. This situation remained, despite repeated requests.

36 Ibid.

Yorkshire and Lanarkshire which paid almost twice as much in affiliation fees. Thus, while as a whole ILP finances were improving nationally, Scotland showed a fall, despite the raising of affiliation fees from 1d to 2d. Even then Scotland's membership fees might have been exaggerated. Other regions operated a system of stamp collections from members, which the Scottish ILP had not introduced, and as a consequence paper membership in Scotland was probably an exaggeration of the real picture.

The Scottish Divisional Council of the ILP had a unique relationship with the National Administrative Council of the party. While in other areas candidatures had individually to receive the full approval of the National Administrative Council, in Scotland the system which operated in the 1918 General Election was continued after the war. The National Administrative Council agreed in April 1919 that 'all Scottish nominees accepted by the Divisional Council be endorsed by the NAC, as on the occasion of the last general election, subject to the total grant from the national election fund to Scotland not exceeding the amount given to any other single area'⁽³⁷⁾. But as subscriptions from Scotland fell in 1921, the arrangement became less acceptable. First, Scottish candidates became subject to a national decision that every election candidate receive only half the sum of money intended, £50 instead of £100. Second, the ILP National Administrative Council decided to withhold confirmation and support for additional candidatures, thus ruling out candidates in both East Renfrewshire and Roxburgh and Selkirk constituencies⁽³⁸⁾.

Nevertheless, the ILP in Scotland had been preparing for a major presence at a future general election. As early as January 1919 Glasgow ILP branches had been urged by the Glasgow Federation's Election Committee: 'to take steps immediately to prepare for the next Parliamentary election. This should include the early

37 ILP National Administrative Council, April 2, 1919.

38 Ibid., May 18, 1922.

selection of an ILP nominee⁽³⁹⁾. In August when the ILP feared the possibility of an unexpected general election branches were further urged 'to expedite their arrangement for nominating candidates'⁽⁴⁰⁾. But again as finances became tight, the Glasgow Federation refused to endorse candidatures where no guarantee was forthcoming of finances to pay at least the election deposit. In February 1920 Tradeston ILP were asked to consider their financial position before adopting a candidate,⁽⁴¹⁾ and in August their support for a candidature in the Gorbals was withheld until evidence was received that the branch had the requisite £150 deposit in hand⁽⁴²⁾. When the Camlachie ILP wanted to adopt a candidate, with only £50 in hand, the Election Committee demanded that £150 be first deposited with the Treasurer of the Federation⁽⁴³⁾.

In March 1921 branches were urged to 'get their finances and membership in order... in view of an early general election'⁽⁴⁴⁾. But the financial situation had become so serious by December 1921 that a special conference was held to discuss how many constituencies the party could afford to fight. The Election Committee recommended that 'not less than six or more than eight constituencies should be fought' and it was agreed that each constituency which proposed to contest the general election required to have £200 in hand by January 1922⁽⁴⁵⁾. A measure of the seriousness of the situation was the decision by 23 votes to 16 to delay endorsement of George Buchanan's candidature in the Gorbals⁽⁴⁶⁾.

39 Glasgow ILP Federation, Election Committee, January 1919.

40 Ibid., August 13, 1919.

41 Ibid., February 2, 1920.

42 Ibid., August 10, 1920.

43 Ibid., September 17, 1920.

44 Ibid., March 4, 1921.

45 Ibid., December 9, 1921.

46 Glasgow ILP Executive, December 23, 1920.

The scale of the difficulties which the ILP faced as a result of the recession was spelt out by Patrick Dollan, the Glasgow Federation Chairman, when he addressed the Party's annual meeting in March 1922. The report of the Federation had admitted that: 'the economic depression has reduced our paying membership. The number of members remains steady, the decline in income being due to unemployment';⁽⁴⁷⁾ and Dollan added that 'the very bad times through which the workers were passing...were affecting adversely the financial membership of the party'⁽⁴⁸⁾. Yet the ILP organisation in Glasgow rallied and had allowed nine candidates to be adopted by March 1922. With a Co-operative Party candidate in Tradeston, the party were confident still that four other candidates could be found for Partick, Hillhead, Kelvingrove and Central. Only Pollok was ruled out, the circumstances being 'inopportune'⁽⁴⁹⁾.

The problems of Glasgow were repeated throughout the country. Early in 1922, the Scottish Divisional Council of the ILP had to form a special committee to examine finance and organisation for the general election in the face of 'general apathy and depression'. The seriousness of the position was summed up by the Labour Party's Scottish Secretary, Ben Shaw, who accepted that unemployment would undermine the party's fighting efficiency.

In fact while there were fifty more Labour candidates in Britain in the 1922 election than in 1918, Scotland could afford only to field four more. Most were to be either ILP or miners' union nominees.

Labour Party membership was difficult to calculate given that no precise figures were compiled before 1928. Labour Party branches increased in number however. There were only 193 branches in January 1918 but a year later there were 200. By 1922-23 there.

47 Glasgow ILP Federation, Annual Report, March, 1922.

48 Glasgow ILP Federation, Annual Meeting, March 31, 1922.

49 Glasgow ILP Federation, Election Committee, March 1922.

were 150 local Labour Parties with 66 divisional Labour Parties but the Executive had to admit "some of these local Labour Parties are not very active except at election time"⁽⁵⁰⁾. It was the Independent Labour Party that made the running. Scottish membership was estimated to rise from 3,000 in January 1917 to 9,000 in June 1918. While membership remained at this figure throughout most of 1919, that was the peak of ILP membership. By February 1921, as the depression began to hit Scotland, membership fell to 7,000. And for the year 1921-22 paying members amounted to only 3,200. Thus the ILP were probably right to admit that membership fell in the post-war period by around 7,000 members as depression hit Scotland and from 169 branches in 1918 the numbers fell to 158 in 1922. In the year 1923-24 membership recovered to just over 5,000. The ILP was strongest in Glasgow and Lanarkshire (with the numbers of branches in mining areas accounting for a third of branches, if somewhat less of the membership) and although the party was generally weak in the east of Scotland, in particular Fife, where the SDF was the main socialist society, Edinburgh Central was the party's biggest east of Scotland branch. The Party's hope for membership offices throughout Scotland bore little fruit, with only a Scottish Office and Glasgow Office in being. As with the rest of Scotland Glasgow membership figures were based on those who were fully paid up and 'paper' membership was always higher. For example, in March 1918 the party had only 1970 fully paid up members but it claimed more than 3,000 - 3,331 were 'on the books'. In 1919 the party was doing better than ever, with the Glasgow Annual report recording 'a period of progress' for the thirty branches of the party. 85% of ILP Glasgow members were men⁽⁵¹⁾. The biggest branches were in the most skilled areas of the city, and in Bridgeton and Springburn⁽⁵²⁾. Thus in 1920 membership had risen

50 Labour Party, Scottish Executive, Report, 1923, p.4.

51 Glasgow ILP Federation, March 29, 1918 and Annual Report, March 28, 1919.

52 Ibid., March 28, 1919.

from 2270 at the end of 1918⁽⁵³⁾ to 2,641, an increase of 371 in fully paid up members, by the end of 1919⁽⁵⁴⁾. But in early 1920 membership was 'falling off' after an 'advance in monthly subscriptions',⁽⁵⁵⁾. While there was an inrush of new members after further Labour successes in the 1920 municipal elections, making a year end membership of 2,992,⁽⁵⁶⁾ the Glasgow Chairman Patrick Dollan had to admit 'the very bad times through which the workers were passing and which were affecting adversely the financial membership of the party',⁽⁵⁷⁾. The party's membership only recovered after the boost of the 1922 elections⁽⁵⁸⁾. Ironically the Glasgow Labour membership was far lower for the period than that of the Unionists, and the evidence suggests that while in 1919, in particular, party membership was rising quickly, 'Labour and the ILP were never mass membership parties in Scotland.

The industrial unrest of the period from 1919 to 1921 was the most serious faced by any government this century. Kendall has written:

The reaction against all forms of political and economic authority was immediate and unprecedented. There was always a fear that the British working man would find the ordinary channels of political activity either inadequate or useless.⁽⁵⁹⁾

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid., Annual Report, March 26, 1920.

55 Ibid., March 22, 1921.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid. March 31, 1922.

58 Ibid., April 6, 1923.

59 W Kendall, op.cit., p.30.

The fear of prospective revolution was not restricted to the events of 1919 when the Scottish Secretary, with Churchill, was sufficiently worried to send tanks into George Square. As late as January 1920 Armitage can write of the Cabinet Supply and Transport Committee's meetings when it discussed the 'Mines and the Nation' Campaign, that the Committee was 'more alarmed than any time in its history 'with members speaking of prospective 'coup d'etats' in the major cities, and with Scots MP Horne, telegraphing Lloyd George that the miners were poised to take the country 'at its weakest' in March. This is in accord with the account of Sir Basil Thomson⁽⁶⁰⁾. As late as 1921 also the Government feared that in Scotland there could be a breakdown of law and order speaking of 'inflammable elements' particularly in the mining area.

What had in fact happened was that the Labour leadership had channelled working class activity into Parliamentary channels. By supporting and then guiding the militancy it had defused its impact - and softened its effect. There was, however, no significant basis for an industrial movement when thousands were unemployed and the fear of unemployment was high. But a militant political movement was possible - and it was diverted, as the miners' case showed into Parliamentary channels. Significantly, the independent Labour Party in Scotland had developed no new body of theory which made it any more than a party aiming at gradual control through Parliamentary and municipal elections. It is significant that it was James Maxton who later was to argue a third way to socialism - between gradualism and communism - who showed himself as wedded to an evolutionary course as any when he wrote in 1922:

60 For further information, see B Gilbert, British Social Policy, 1918-1939, (London, 1970) and S Armitage, The Politics of Decontrol of Industry: Britain and the United States, (London, 1969).

We believe that an educated majority is the most active . agency for the advancement towards the new order of society we call socialism. The party are not advocates of force as a means to socialism. It believes that the constructive power of intelligence is greater than the destructive power of force. It is evolutionary rather than cataclysmic. It keeps an open mind and is not bound by iron dogma. The party must not predict the complete realisation of its programme tomorrow or next month or next year.(61)

It was this cautious moderation, concentrating on the long term creation of socialist consciousness (and short term, on the issues of poverty and unemployment) that was to triumph in 1922. Only later did the Labour left argue a bolder course. But by the later twenties their strategy for 'socialism with speed' was incapable of evoking mass support - and isolated them from Labour's Scottish leadership and the rank and file.

61 Forward, August 28, 1922.

CHAPTER 3

THE LIBERAL AND UNIONIST PARTIES - 1918-1922

I COALITION POLICY AND ANTI-SOCIALIST PROPAGANDA

The socialist threat dominated the attentions of the anti-socialist parties in the immediate post-war period. In particular counteracting socialist propaganda was the basic aim of Conservative organisation in Scotland, as it fought what it considered to be a very real threat from Labour and socialism. The Labour Party's progress especially in the municipal elections of 1919 shocked pro-Coalition forces in Scotland into a more aggressive support for 'fusion'. And while the Liberals were absorbed for most of the period in internal disputes, what lay behind these disputes in many cases was what political vehicles would be most effective in countering socialism.

It was, however, the Unionists in Scotland who made most of the running. The development of their anti-socialist campaign aimed at creating a party with full-time organisers and lecturers, and a propaganda machine which would work through pamphleteering and meetings, not simply under the Unionist banner but through umbrella organisations. In local government it meant the formation of anti-socialist pacts, with the Good Government League of Glasgow a model for other areas to follow. Their campaign was to be at two levels, the first, a simple attack on socialism, which they equated with Bolshevism, and the second, a championing of social reform. The Glasgow Unionist Association, for example, accepted that 'far reaching reforms...are required',⁽¹⁾ and most Coalition candidates in 1918 had supported substantial measures of social reform. But as the chances of a progressive reconstruction policy declined in 1919, the Conservative emphasis centred increasingly on the constitutional threat posed by Labour extremists.

1 Glasgow Unionist Association, 6th Annual Report, January 27, 1919.

The Scottish Secretary, Robert Munro, a Coalition Liberal Member, was to claim in 1920 that the Coalition Cabinet had been 'the first government to tackle the housing problems' it had been responsible for 'the most radical and far reaching land act that had been passed in modern times'; and in general Scotland was benefitting from the far-reaching reconstruction policies of the Coalition Government⁽²⁾. In their magazine People's Politics, which was intended to appeal to a mass working-class audience, the Scottish Unionists were to claim that industrial and social reform were 'not the monopoly of the Labour Party'. They went on to argue that:

Many items of social and industrial reform in the Labour Party's programme are already being carried out or are on the road to settlement by the coalition government.

That the self-styled Labour Party is far from being the only party which understands the reforms needed in industry and social life.

That no man or woman need vote for the so called 'Labour' party to get wise reforms.⁽³⁾

But the achievement of the Coalition Government was minuscule in relation to the problem that Scotland faced. Rent restriction was continued, being extended twice with the result that in most cases the proportion of income allocated to housing in working-class family budgets decreased. National insurance was extended to new groups of workers, and the Government was forced to extend the payment of poor relief to the unemployed. But on major social issues, the coalition failed.

Housebuilding schemes failed miserably. In the first months of 1919 there was a spate of planning approvals which meant that by November plans had been accepted for 13,500 houses⁽⁴⁾. But by

2 Scotsman, May 3, 1920.

3 People's Politics, 1919.

4 Scotsman, November 1, 1919.

December 1921 still only 21,344 houses had been actually approved for building. The Scottish Board of Health admitted that 115,000 houses required to be built, and that 'it would seem...that even making allowances for the houses being provided under the private builder's subsidy scheme, the needs of housing in Scotland will only be met to the extent of about one fourth'⁽⁵⁾. People's Politics went further and stated that 'one quarter of a million new homes must be built'⁽⁶⁾. In fact between 1919 and 1923 only 25,000 homes were completed⁽⁷⁾.

Behind the failure lay the policy of retrenchment in public expenditure. As the 1921 report of the Scottish Board of Health explained, 'the need for economy has dominated our policy throughout the year. In all the social services administered by us, expenditure has been severely restricted'⁽⁸⁾, and social reform became even more insignificant as the scale of the recession became apparent. Unemployment mounted from the end of 1920 onwards, and it affected skilled workers as well as semi-skilled and unskilled. In many ways it was the resentment of the miners and skilled workers which was to be the most pronounced change in attitudes in the period. While the real wages for most of those at work did not fall substantially until 1923, the relative position of many skilled workers was being eroded by the post-war settlements that were made. The miners and engineers were to suffer most.

5 Scottish Board of Health, Report 1922, PP XIII (Cmnd.1697) p.77.

6 People's Politics, 1919.

7 C Harvie, op.cit., p.71.

8 Scottish Board of Health, Report 1921, PP 1922 XIII, (Cmnd, 1697) p.77. The report continued that: 'it was with special reluctance what we found it necessary to curtail services or stop developments that but for the serious financial conditions of the country we should have been bound, in the interests of the people's health, to encourage.'

As a result of the recession the Coalition Government was forced to make major concessions in the administration of poor relief. In particular, it made major changes in 1921 as unemployment mounted and local charitable funds ran out. With the miners' strike of the first few months of 1921, a new circular to the parish councils came from the Board of Health stating that a striker as well as his dependents could be helped. At the same time the parish councils under the pressure of growing numbers out of work gave what was previously forbidden - poor relief to the unemployed. In September 1921 the Lord Advocate stated that relief could be given and promised that the Government would introduce retrospective legislation to protect the positions of parish councils⁽⁹⁾. The Government was also forced to tolerate the payments of relief on higher scales than previously by some councils. The reason was admitted in a confidential report by the Scottish Board of Health:

Distress is widespread and is especially marked throughout the steel and mining areas. As resources diminish and distress becomes more acute...there are very inflammable elements which, while subjected during ordinary times to damping down by the saner and much larger section of the community, will not improbably be fanned into activity, as the endurance of that more sober section is broken by the continued tightening of waistbelts round empty bellies.⁽¹⁰⁾

Coalition policy had necessarily to vary between retrenchment and appeasement as the 1922 Board of Health report made clear:

The policy throughout the year has been shaped mainly by two factors - the need for the economy and the distress amongst large sections of the population caused by the prolonged trade depression. The pull of these two factors in opposite directions has made this year a difficult one in the administration of social services, for while we have continued to carry out a policy of rigorous economy we have had to administer exceptional measures...to relieve social distress.⁽¹¹⁾

9 I Levitt, op.cit., p.262-282.

10 Scottish Board of Health, Memorandum, loc.cit., p.7.

11 Report of Scottish Board of Health, 1922, op.cit., p.6.

What went wrong? That Conservatives in Scotland could commit themselves to social reform in the 1918 election and during 1919 was a measure of how far 'reconstruction' had entered the official Whitehall vocabulary. In his Land fit for Heroes, Johnson has shown how the highly complex plans of the Ministry of Reconstruction included abolition of the poor law, building homes, extending insurance, rural development, education and health improvement. The failure of reconstruction and with it the decontrol of industry and public spending cuts following the 'Geddes Axe' have been assessed in a variety of ways: the politics and ideology of the Coalition Government and Parliament, the failure of administrators to grasp the new mood, the more limited extent of social participation during the war (in contrast with World War Two) which reduced the pressing need for concessionary legislation, or the economic downswing when plans for social reform had to be reassessed on the grounds of cost (as Lloyd George argued, 'the economy had run riot'). Certainly there is some truth in all of these explanations⁽¹²⁾.

But perhaps the view taken by Armitage sums up the naivety of coalition promises and the reasons for their failure:

Reconstruction included not only measures of social reform but also measures to aid industry and other groups such as farmers. Social reform measures never had clear priority nor it seems clear were they meant to...the working-class believed mistakenly that it (reconstruction) was a policy created to serve ONLY their interests where the Cabinet had a larger objective in view. It is vital to stress that the Cabinet believed until well into 1919 that it had the resources to meet the (reasonable) demands of all groups. The lack of clear priorities sprang from the belief that there should be enough for everyone.⁽¹³⁾

12 For a further discussion, see K Morgan, Consensus and Disunity, op.cit.; P B Johnson, Land Fit for Heroes, (Chicago, 1968); and K Morgan, 'Lloyd George's Stage Army', in A Taylor (ed.) Lloyd George: Twelve Essays, (London, 1971).

13 S Armitage, op.cit., p.159.

Armitage suggests that 'there is no clear evidence that the Cabinet was following a deliberately devious policy of delay and concession until it felt strong enough to repress Labour. The evidence rather is that the Cabinet policy in early 1919 was too incoherent for any general policy to emerge'. The real problem was, Armitage concludes, that 'the idea of an interventionist government was too new to be generally accepted' (14).

In Scotland as in the rest of Britain no coherent Conservative or Coalition ideology was formulated which could deal with 'the disagreeable facts of social conflict', recognising that there was conflict between different social groups and choices had to be made. Thus it was hardly surprising as Armitage records that 'if one accepted the assumption of the Balfour Committee report that a special effort was necessary to restore Britain's position in world markets, then opposition to wage increases and to heavy social expenditure followed logically'. Clearly, the Coalition Government was forced into compromises. The effect, Gilbert suggests, of the provision of dole in 1918 was 'to admit a new principle...admitting that in effect an adult working man had a right to make a claim upon it (Society)' (15). But without a coherent ideology, the Conservatives were reduced to making concessions as long as these did not interfere too much with the market economy.

It is not surprising in these conditions that the emphasis of anti-socialist activity became directed towards propaganda, rather than policy, to rhetoric rather than action. In the months immediately after the war ended, as the situation in Russia became more apparent, the perceived threat was Bolshevism, which many

14 Ibid., p.159-60.

15 B Gilbert, op.cit., p.60.

feared would be transplanted to Scotland; later the emphasis switched to an attack on socialism and in particular the threat of nationalisation and confiscation. In this chapter we examine the attempts by both Conservative and Liberal Parties to reconstruct their organisations in the new conditions of the post-war era. While the Conservatives made some progress particularly in the west of Scotland, the Liberals were so divided on the question of electoral arrangements that it was difficult for them to present themselves as a credible alternative to the Unionists. .

II THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE UNIONIST PARTY

The Conservative Party was alive to the new conditions created by the extension of the franchise and by the post-war social unrest. From 1918 onwards it adopted an active policy of attacking socialist propaganda. Its aim was to create through a building-up of mass membership, through lecture and pamphlet propaganda, and through full-time organisers and speakers, a modern party organisation that was capable of withstanding the threat it saw from the Labour Party. In the immediate post-war years Unionists in Scotland were almost totally committed to coalition politics. Without electoral arrangements they believed they would suffer defeat at the hands of Labour. Surprisingly perhaps they seemed uninterested in policy matters: while they defended the Coalition's social programme, they did not initiate any policy discussions of their own. Rather they concentrated all their energies on the attack on socialism. In this chapter, we shall examine how successful the Conservatives were in reforming their local organisations; creating a propaganda machine; and building a mass party with full time officials.

The quickness of the response to the new conditions created by a mass franchise was shown by the memorandum 'Representation of the People Act: Memorandum by Central Council', which was approved in private at the Unionist Association Conference in December 1917. Marked 'Urgent', it went 'as guidance' to local associations in February 1918. It argued that a mass membership had become essential and that organisation had to be modernised:

The enlarged size of the constituencies and, even more than that, the spirit of the age render it absolutely necessary that all classes...should have a share in the direction of the affairs of the association and should be welcomed in its deliberations... Further it is obvious that, in order to ensure success, constant and much more intensive work will be required than in the past. In view of the fact that all elections are to take place on the same day each Association will require to rely more than ever upon the individual efforts of its members.

Unless vigorous and persistent propaganda work is carried out previous to an election it will be hopeless to attempt to make up the leeway in the rush to an election.(1)

The memorandum pointed out that electors would require 'education and wide guidance' which could only be achieved by 'effective organisation' (2).

Despite the addition of women voters, the party also resolved that separate women's sections be disbanded; rather 'women should be admitted to all associations on the same footing as men', with the sole 'test of election being efficiency'. But while the Council had been unanimous in agreeing that the fusion of men's and women's associations be 'absolute', any association was still left free to appoint a Women's Association, although it was careful to argue that 'care should be taken to ensure that these committees were representative of all classes of the community', with this rule applying to officebearers as well as members (3).

The *raison d'être* of the Unionists in the post-war years was to create a propaganda machine to counter socialism. As the Glasgow Unionist Association made clear in its first post-war report, 'At a time like the present when there is such universal political unrest and when a ceaseless propaganda is being carried on in our midst by men of revolutionary opinions, it is necessary that those who value ordered progress and the stability of the state should organise themselves for combined action'. It then appealed on this basis

1 Scottish Unionist Association Central Council, February 1918.

2 Ibid.

3 Western Divisional Council, May 4 1921.

for new members, 'for all citizens who are in general sympathy with the coalition party, and who desire that the far-reaching reforms, that are admittedly required, shall be attained by constitutional and parliamentary means, to come forward to join its ranks and give it their support'(4).

Counteracting socialism obsessed the party especially in the west of Scotland, and the Western Divisional Council devoted much of its time to discussing how most effectively they could oppose socialist propaganda. At their second meeting of 1919, in June, the Council for example, 'felt that there was an urgent need for the education of the people in sound economic doctrines and in the true principles of democratic government and that the Government being national and non-party in its composition might with great public advantage take action, on similar lines to those followed by the War Aims Committee, to counteract the efforts and teaching of the revolutionaries'(5). This sounded a theme that was to be pronounced in the coming years, when for example, the Glasgow Unionist Association fulminated against 'theories subversive of all the established social and political order, which were being widely and assiduously spread', and called for 'a strong vigilant and efficient organisation of loyal citizens...as a bulwark against revolution'.

One of the foremost arms of propaganda amongst working class members of the population was considered to be the magazine, People's Politics. It had been started in 1914 and ran to four issues before it fell away during the war. When it was revived in 1919, its mandate was that 'it should not be purely political and should contain articles of general interest', particularly questions of concern to women, but its main emphasis was the attack on socialism⁽⁶⁾, identifying that ideology with Bolshevism and with

4 6th Annual Report, Glasgow Unionist Association, January 27, 1919.

5 Western Divisional Council, June 4, 1919.

6 Eastern Divisional Council, June 25, 1919.

Russia, and deploying attacks on Labour Party activists by their own party members or by trade union leaders as its means of exposing the revolutionary aims within Labour. Articles exposing Russia and Bolshevism were legion. But at the same time the magazine attempted to show the positive achievements of the Coalition. In October 1919, the issue which stated that 'one quarter of a million new homes must be built', also attempted to show how rent control was operating in the interests of the working man. The magazine favoured land settlement schemes, admitting that the 1911 Small-holdings Act had achieved 'not enough so far', and insisting that the impediments to progress were being removed. Later editions attempted to chart the progress, but in 1921 the magazine had to admit that up till then land settlement had been 'seriously hampered by the inadequacy of funds available', although it predicted more money was on its way⁽⁷⁾. Its general theme was that industrial and social reform were 'not the monopoly of the Labour Party', and to attack Labour as extremists and revolutionaries. People's Politics had a chequered career. Its first 'experimental issue' had a print run of 100,000 copies after grants had been agreed in October 1918 for its publication⁽⁸⁾. This issue sold in shops; 30,000 copies were distributed in the west and 25,000 in the east, well short of the 100,000 printed⁽⁹⁾ with the result that numbers for the second issue were 'considerably reduced'⁽¹⁰⁾. By October 1920 the Western Executive of the party found that only 6,000 were now being sold, and recommended that the associations should be charged for half the costs of publication⁽¹¹⁾.

7 Peoples Politics.

8 Western Divisional Council, June 4, 1919.

9 Eastern Divisional Council, June 24, 1919.

10 Western Divisional Council, November 5, 1919; Eastern Divisional Council Executive, November 24, 1919.

11 Western Divisional Council Executive, October 6, 1920.

The East found its finances had been 'almost completely absorbed' in paying for the magazine and in April 1921 a decision was made in view of the 'steadily decreasing demand' to discontinue publication⁽¹²⁾. It had, however, run to ten issues in the period when militancy was highest.

People's Politics was only one arm of the Unionists' anti-socialist propaganda, which aimed, firstly to narrow the differences between the left and right on the issues of social reform and thereby to defuse Labour's appeal, and second to equate socialism with extremism, Bolshevism, and the destruction of civilisation, though increasingly it was the second theme that became paramount. The paper was initially complemented and then replaced by the wholesale distribution of pamphlets, although the party also considered more sophisticated techniques such as 'the use of cinematograph films as valuable aid to propaganda'⁽¹³⁾. Leaflets in 1920, for example, took the form of pamphlets justifying profits and interest on capital and opposing Guild socialism and syndicalism. But the main interest in 1919 and 1920 was in opposing nationalisation. In the West of Scotland alone, 100,000 leaflets were issued before April 1920 on the coal question and by the autumn it was reported that 400,000 leaflets in all had been distributed. During the coal crisis of 1920, the party resolved to take 'immediate steps' to explain the government's position in mining areas⁽¹⁴⁾.

Meetings were also organised throughout the country in an attempt to counteract socialist propaganda and the practice of employing full-time speakers, usually working-class men, was begun to 'carry

12 Eastern Divisional Council Executive, April 5, 1921.

13 Western Divisional Council, January 7, 1920.

14 Western Divisional Council, September 1, 1920.

on a campaign against socialism and bolshevism and to instruct the electorate in elementary economics'⁽¹⁵⁾. By October 1919 four speakers employed full-time by the Western Divisional Council had addressed 246 meetings during the year⁽¹⁶⁾, and with the numbers raised to seven, 71 meetings were held during November and December 1919, although it was not always possible to find suitable speakers. The late months of 1919 saw the height of Unionist meetings, with the impetus falling away in the first three months of 1920 as attention was taken up by the Paisley by-election. But in the Eastern Division in particular a decision was made to concentrate to the maximum possible on the employment of open-air speakers. This was seen as the most effective means of allocating resources⁽¹⁷⁾.

The Conservatives were also close to a series of 'non-political organisations' which chose to play their part in attacking the Bolshevik and socialist menace. The party supported for example the Scottish Economic League which sent speakers out to open-air meetings⁽¹⁸⁾. With Unionist support two other organisations were prominent in anti-socialist propaganda between 1919 and 1922. The Reconstruction and Anti-Socialist Union was supported by industrialists and financiers and between 1919 and 1923, it estimated it had run just under 3,000 meetings in Scotland, one third of the 8,600 meetings it sponsored throughout Britain. It was a measure of the assumed socialist threat in Scotland and particularly the West of Scotland that 2,000 of these meetings were held in Clydeside⁽¹⁹⁾.

15 Eastern Executive, October 22, 1919.

16 Western Divisional Council, December 3, 1919.

17 Eastern Divisional Council, February 28, 1920, July 28, 1920.

18 SUA Western Divisional Council, March 3, 1920.

19 Monthly Journal of Glasgow Chamber of Commerce, March 1923, pp.59-59, cited in A Nassibian op.cit., p.176-7.

Another anti-socialist organisation was the Middle Class Union, launched in London in March 1919 with its Scottish organisation formed in the same month. Its aim was 'to organise the middle classes' to co-operate in protecting their interests, achieving equitable taxation and removing unfair burdens on their businesses. It believed that even the coalition government was making unfair concessions to Labour opinion, and was to be one organisation which joined in anti-Labour pacts of the period⁽²⁰⁾.

Generally, however, the Conservatives were prepared to take on most of the burden of anti-socialist propaganda themselves, with lecture courses on Bolshevism and socialism, the most favoured activity, although the general conclusion of the Secretary of the Scottish Unionist Office, Blair, was that this had been 'wholly negative propaganda'⁽²¹⁾. In addition, a separate summer school for Unionists in Scotland was organised first as an experiment, then continuously⁽²²⁾.

Special concern was expressed by Unionists for the danger that the youth of Scotland would be influenced by socialist teaching. Thus in 1919 a decision was made to resuscitate the Junior Imperialist League, on the grounds that 'the young men of the party would be of great assistance in the work of counteracting the socialist propaganda'⁽²³⁾. The League whose membership grew immediately in 1919 and 1920 was encouraged by the Scottish Conference of the Unionists in 1920 which unanimously resolved in a private session its strategy for anti-socialist propaganda. It voted that 'this conference is satisfied of the urgent necessity of continuous education of the people in the political and economic principles of

20 Glasgow Herald, May 17, 1919. The fortunes of the Middle Class Union in Scotland are charted by A Nassibian, op.cit., p.179.

21 SUA Eastern Committee Executive, June 27, 1923.

22 SUA Central Council Executive, October 6, 1921.

23 SUA Western Divisional Council November 5, 1919.

the Unionist Party by means of organised political study and a comprehensive scheme of outdoor speaking, and recommends that the strong support of all Unionists should be given to the Worker's League and the Junior Imperialist League in their efforts to carry on the work and strongly approves of the institution of a summer school of political study'⁽²⁴⁾. In fact the League, Unionists claimed, went from strength to strength and a group for eight to fifteen year olds, formed first in Bridgeton, had by April 1922 expanded to sixteen areas with a child membership of 1,000 in all⁽²⁵⁾.

The Conservatives felt that a mass membership was essential to meeting the socialist threat and they were to take much comfort from the Glasgow ILP's report of 1922 which showed that its membership was decreasing while theirs was improving. But increased membership was not an end in itself. The party's Western Divisional Council suggested to their constituency associations in June 1920 that 'in forming their programmes for the next winter the local associations should not confine themselves to social meetings but should make arrangements for political lectures of an educational kind'. Discussion about womens' committees also concentrated on how to politicise members⁽²⁶⁾.

At the end of the war it was accepted in Glasgow that 'inevitably the membership is below what would be regarded as satisfactory in normal times'⁽²⁷⁾. Yet reports from constituencies in

24 SUA Scottish Central Council, Report of Annual Conference 1920.

25 SUA Western Divisional Council, April 5, 1922.

26 SUA Western Divisional Council June 7, 1922.

27 Glasgow Unionist Association, 6th Annual Report, January 27, 1919.

Glasgow showed that membership grew rapidly in the early nineteen twenties. Table 3.1 shows the rising party membership until 1922.

TABLE 3.1

Glasgow Unionist Association: Membership

	1918	1919	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925
Bridgeton	373	413	836	909	1175	1054	954	974
Camlachie		825	1525	1400	1977	1982	1985	2250
Cathcart		1800	1800	1600				
Central		243	1460	1710		825	1000	
Gorbals		400						
Govan	200		800		458	252		
Hillhead			1586		2625	2449	2493	2733
Kelvingrove		232	1251	1991	2067	2044	2024	2455
Maryhill				1528	1534	2057	2231	2721
Partick	525			520		490	668	1309
Pollock	264	1870		1431	2122	2718	3054	3602
St Rollox	400	523		1229	1215	1648	1209	1203
Shettleston		435	500	500	500	400	400	732
Springburn				700	1007	800	839	1225
Tradeston		1120	1752	1848	1973	1695	1865	2485
Recorded Membership		1758	7861	11510	17713	20094	20972	21689

Source: Reports of Glasgow Unionist Association, 1919-1926. The total figures are obviously an underestimate given the failure of some constituency associations to complete their returns.

Behind this increase lay also an improvement in organisation. In Glasgow, in 1920, for example there were organising secretaries in eleven of fifteen divisions(28). In 1921 there was again 'considerable growth', (29) and further improvement in

28 Ibid., 7th Annual Report, January, 1920.

29 Ibid., 8th Annual Report, January, 1921.

organisation. In 1922, also, membership had 'substantially increased' and only three Glasgow constituencies were without full-time organisers⁽³⁰⁾. In a few divisions in 1923 there was a small increase, in others a fall and the general impression was one of relative stagnation as the Conservatives suffered the effects of the recession. In Govan it was reported 'impossible to canvas for subscriptions among the working people in the constituencies simply because for once they were not working'. Shettleston's membership was 'the smallest in our history' and in Springburn the loss of three hundred was attributed to 'the detrimental effect of unemployment'⁽³¹⁾. In 1924 the position was similar, as 'the industrial conditions have continued during the year to militate against increase in the numerical strength of the association. In the circumstances it is a cause for legitimate satisfaction that the membership has been maintained at its former level'⁽³²⁾. Only in 1925, did membership again show a substantial increase⁽³³⁾.

In Glasgow the practice of requiring a small membership fee to be paid was adopted. In other areas recruits were not expected automatically to pay a subscription although in its report on constituency organisation in Edinburgh North, the organisation committee of the Eastern Council suggested that 'greater interest would be taken by the rank and file if they paid a small membership fee'. It was accepted, however, that this system had many opponents in the East of Scotland. Discussions on a membership fee led to a Chairman's letter encouraging it.

30 Ibid., 9th Annual Report, January, 1922.

31 Ibid., 10th Annual Report, January, 1923.

32 Ibid., 11th Annual Report, January, 1924.

33 Ibid., 12th Annual Report, January 1925.

The progress of the early twenties in Glasgow was mirrored by similar improvements in the West of Scotland as a whole. While the same detailed figures for membership outside Glasgow do not survive, the Western Divisional Council heard in 1920 of 'a large increase in membership over the last year', particularly gratifying to the party since so many new members were women⁽³⁴⁾. As in Glasgow the progress continued through until 1922, with the Western Divisional Council recording in February 1922, that 'the membership in proportion to the electorate was larger than at any time since the outbreak of war'⁽³⁵⁾. The East of Scotland where the battle against socialism seemed less immediate was not in such a happy state. During the same period, the East's Treasurer's Committee had to report difficulties in obtaining subscriptions and on the limited funds available for propaganda purposes. In May 1922, for example, the party recognised that 'a far greater effort should be made to meet the menace by counter propaganda', but had to recognise that 'such propaganda called for the expenditure of more money'⁽³⁶⁾. But in fact earlier, in 1921, a policy of 'reducing expenditure and activity' had already been agreed by the Eastern Executive, and in the event the Executives of local associations were asked 'whether they could not themselves arrange counter propaganda where necessary to meet the activities of the Labour Party'. The number of staff in the Eastern Office was also cut and smaller offices rented.

How active the constituencies were was the subject of continued discussion and investigation⁽³⁷⁾ by the Eastern Executive between 1918

34 SUA Western Divisional Council, May 5, 1920.

35 SUA Western Divisional Council, February 1, 1922.

36 SUA Eastern Divisional Council.

37 SUA Eastern Executive, June 22, 1921. The conclusions of the eventual report are quoted in the following pages.

and 1924. Research reports for each constituency were commissioned, an Organisation Committee was created and finally in 1924 a scheme was proposed for local contacts between constituencies through regional conferences to secure 'an exchange of views upon matters of organisation and policy' with the primary aim, 'the framing in practical detail of proposed schemes of organisation'. The special organising committee was established by the Eastern Executive in June 1921 because of 'the unsatisfactory condition of party organisation in some of the constituencies within its province'. It soon reinforced the view that membership and activity were undesirably low in most areas. The committee found that little or no organisation existed in many of the seats held by Coalition Liberals and that a far greater effort was required to build membership and machinery in the other seats of the North East and Borders.

Orkney and Shetland and Caithness and Sutherland were both recognised as to a large extent special areas, constituencies which 'almost invariably returned its members on personal grounds' and especially since one of the seats was recognised as a Coalition Liberal seat, Unionist organisation was regarded as 'quite sufficient'. No such comforting conclusion was possible in many other instances. No organisation for example existed in Western Isles and almost none in Inverness where funds were 'zero'. In Banff however, 'no action was considered necessary meantime' since organisation 'on paper' was 'not too bad'. In South Aberdeen it was felt 'more strenuous efforts might defeat their own purposes'. Forfarshire was 'suitably organised, in a satisfactory position financially'; in Kinross and West Perth organisation was 'very fair under the circumstances and likely to work well at an election', in Perth itself, where there was considered to be 'less enthusiasm' than in Kinross and West Perthshire, interference was 'necessary'. Roxburgh-Selkirk constituency had gained a new organiser and although held by a Coalition Liberal organisation was considered 'quite as good as can be expected'.

Edinburgh was regarded as being in relatively sound condition. In Edinburgh North organisation was 'good', and in South Edinburgh the real complaint was that the constituency funds seemed considerably below the level which seemed possible. As a Liberal seat, Edinburgh East, it was felt, could be left alone in the meantime. The same conclusion was reached in West Lothian where organisation was 'quite satisfactory', although its financial position was unfortunate. In the more industrial areas, organisation was extremely patchy where no Conservative held the seat. In West Fife and Dunfermline, the organisation was 'extinct', and in Peebles and South Midlothian it was 'moribund'.

Thus the general view of the Unionists was to concentrate their activities in the constituencies which they held, and particularly those where Labour posed a threat. Where the seat was held by a Coalition Liberal, there was a reluctance to bring their organisations up to the standard to fight an election, the view being that co-operation would outlast the coming elections.

In general Unionist organisation seemed weak or non-existent in Liberal held seats, especially in the North, and this was one reason why there was little grass roots Unionist enthusiasm for a return to the old Liberal-Conservative contests in the post-war era. There were also other signs, which demonstrated to the party's national leaders, who made the running in discussion of 'fusion' and electoral arrangements, that the general feeling, in Scotland at least, was that continued cooperation was desirable. An Anti-Socialist stance was one characteristic of the post-war Scottish Unionists; the other stance they took was support for the Coalition.

The Unionists supported a series of coalition meetings in 1919 and 1920 in Scotland, where speakers were 'representative of both wings' of the Government. The Glasgow Unionist Association

expressed explicit support for a strengthened form of cooperation at their annual meeting in January 1920, and the Unionists supported Sir William Sutherland, the Liberal Coalition Whip, in the Argyll by-election of March 1920⁽³⁸⁾, although they had been unable to reach an agreement with the Paisley Liberals over a Coalition candidate in January.⁽³⁹⁾ In February 1920 the Scottish Unionist Association's conference endorsed the continuation of coalition 'without party prejudice' and went so far as to accept a motion from the Edinburgh Working Men's Association which was tantamount to support for fusion. The proposal called for 'closer cooperation of all supporters on the coalition...as the best means of defeating the pernicious policies of the extreme socialist parties', although it also recognised that 'till this closer cooperation has been achieved the conference considers that all Unionist organisation should be maintained in a state of efficiency'⁽⁴⁰⁾. The Western Divisional Council held discussion on the subject of fusion, cooperation, and the general political situation in the early months of 1920,⁽⁴¹⁾ and their Womens' Committee went further. As their minutes record, 'opinions were strongly expressed in favour of fusion or closer cooperation and of the promulgation of a definite policy'⁽⁴²⁾.

One stumbling block to enhanced cooperation was the Irish situation. With the Western Divisional Council strongly in favour of the Ulster case, motions were passed throughout the period in

38 Western Divisional Council, March 3, 1920

39 For discussion of Paisley by election, see below.

40 Scottish Unionist Association, Report of Conference, February 10, 1920.

41 Western Divisional Council, April 7, 1920

42 Womens Committee, Western Divisional Council, April, 7, 1920.

support of closer relations with Ulster; and eventually one result of the Irish settlement was to deprive the Conservatives in Scotland of the affiliation of the Grand Orange Lodge who up till then had nominated members of the Western Divisional Council⁽⁴³⁾. But difficulties over Ireland were insufficient to discourage moves towards fusion as a means of resisting the socialist threat; and the Western Divisional Council in October 1920 felt that Asquith's increasingly independent line 'would create a feeling favourable to fusion between the Unionists and the Coalition Liberals, that the leaders of the party should be urged to take advantage of the opportunity this afforded them'. These feelings were conveyed to the party leaders⁽⁴⁴⁾.

In the 1919 municipal elections it was felt by Unionists that anti-socialist alliances prevented greater Labour victories. In Edinburgh, for example, where the alliance operated, Labour won no seats at all. As the Scotsman remarked:

The Scottish election may indeed have brought into existence a new coalition, a combination of all sections of Liberals and Unionists against collectivism in politics...the coalition has as firm a foundation as Liberalism ever had.

It went on to add that the Coalition would not be shaken by Liberals outside its ranks, whom it dismissed as 'a party which cannot find a policy.'

At a local level throughout 1919 and 1920 cooperation was being developed through joint Liberal-Conservative participation in local

43 Western Divisional Council, January 11, 1922.

44 Western Divisional Council, October 6, 1920.

authority elections. The turning point came, in places where cooperation did not exist, with the November 1919 elections where: 'the success of the Labour candidates...all over the country suggests that the time had come when the attitude of the Unionist Association should be reconsidered'⁽⁴⁵⁾. The Unionists were particularly worried about the possibility of Labour control of Glasgow and in a confidential memorandum in December 1919 Sir Lewis Shedden, the Unionist organiser in the West of Scotland, argued; 'there is grave reason to fear that they (Labour) may obtain this object unless in the interval something effectual is done to organise the anti-socialist forces in the city'. A private meeting had already been held under the auspices of the Citizens' Union, which the Unionists considered privately to be 'inadequate to the task to be undertaken'. They took the initiative in forming a provisional committee, which contained representatives of the Glasgow Unionists, the Glasgow Liberal Council, and the Womens' Citizens Association, with Shedden arguing that Glasgow could export this model organisation to the rest of Scotland:

If an organisation of the kind proposed is set up in Glasgow it will indicate the lines on which other burghs and districts throughout Scotland should be asked to proceed, and our branch associations might be recommended to take part in or if necessary to initiate schemes of the same kind in their own areas, so that in every area there would be set up a joint organisation to work for the return of non-socialists in the various elections whether for town or county councils, parish councils or education authorities.⁽⁴⁶⁾

45 Glasgow Unionist Association, '1919 Memorandum' marked 'private and confidential', Sir Lewis Shedden, December, 1919.

46 Ibid.

The final upshot was the Good Government League, which not only included the Glasgow Unionist Associations and Liberal Council, but also the Rotary Club, the Citizens' Vigilance Association, and the Citizens' Union. It initially formed the Glasgow Municipal Electors' League and then, with the addition of women's organisations, the Good Government Committee⁽⁴⁷⁾.

The result was that the anti-socialist list groupings retained control of Glasgow throughout the twenties - and only lost control of Glasgow when the Scottish Protestant Party split the right wing vote⁽⁴⁸⁾. Glasgow took the lead in an advanced form of cooperation through not only political parties but other organisations that could be considered 'non political' in normal times. The Unionists did press other local associations to do likewise, and at the Scottish Unionist Conference in 1920 a motion was passed urging: 'that the time has come when the Unionist Associations throughout the country should actively concern themselves in local government elections, and that acting when and where possible in combination with other non-socialist organisations, they should endeavour to secure the return to Town and County Councils, Parish Councils and education authorities of men and women of sound progressive and anti-socialist opinions'⁽⁴⁹⁾. It was a proposal which received the endorsement of the Eastern Divisional Council, as well as the West, and from there was born the tradition of local government candidatures under 'ratepayer', 'moderate', 'progressive' and other labels.

47 Ibid.

48 Cook in Age of Alignment, p.83-84, shows that from 1920-26 the anti-socialists won 58% of all seats.

49 Scottish Unionist Conference, 1920.

This new spirit was also shown in parliamentary elections during the first years of post-war Coalition Government. In Glasgow, for example, there was a joint meeting of Liberals and Unionists to adopt a candidate in Kelvingrove. There were also joint meetings to discuss candidatures in both Hamilton and Bothwell. The continued desire among Unionists for coalition arrangements was also seen in the case of Glasgow Cathcart. Here agreement between Liberal and Conservative had been impossible in 1918, but when it was realised the Coalition Liberal member would retire at the next election, the Unionist Association offered in December 1921 to meet the Liberals to 'discuss names of gentlemen acceptable to both associations', and warned that 'if the Liberal Association adopted without consultation it would be resented'. So keen were the Unionist Headquarters in Scotland to reach an amicable settlement that the Scottish Whip, John Gilmour, advised the local Unionists to accept a Liberal nominee. While its President recommended a Liberal, the Association declined to accept someone it had not chosen, although a breakaway group argued in a manifesto that 'the time is most inopportune for splitting the vote of holders of moderate opinion'. This group urged:

An honourable understanding that the status quo in the constituencies should be maintained, so that moderate opinions of both parties might present a United front against the subversive principles of socialism and labour. This attitude has generally been adopted throughout the country and it would be most regrettable were our constituency to prove an unfortunate exception.(50)

Unionist Headquarters resisted a Conservative nominee for Cathcart 'on the grounds that they considered themselves bound by the pact entered into by the whips of both parties', and Gilmour threatened that if the proposal to have a Liberal was 'not acceptable', 'no central assistance in finance or speakers' would be given⁽⁵¹⁾.

50 Glasgow Unionist Association, Annual Report, January 30, 1922.

51 Ibid.

This Central Office pressure in the case of Cathcart showed the importance attached by the Scottish Party Leaders to pacts between Liberals and Conservatives. But most initiative for arrangements did come locally, and perhaps most illustrative of all examples of local 'coalitionism' at work came in St Rollox. Early in 1922, Gideon Murray, the sitting member, was quite simply dropped as candidate by his Conservative executive because of his strongly stated view that the Coalition had 'run its course' and his desire to run as a Conservative, rather than a Coalition candidate. In his place a Coalition candidate was chosen jointly by Unionists and National Liberals.

In March 1922, the Western Council of the Unionists recommended that 'a continuation of alliance and cooperation...is still essential', and at its conference in March, a motion expressed 'its deep sense of gratitude for the great services rendered by the Prime Minister'⁽⁵²⁾. In both East and West the prospective candidates who were being endorsed in 1922 were coalition rather than simply Unionist candidates. At the Scottish Associations' Conference in January 1922 Gideon Murray referred to the possible formation of a centre party and proposed that 'no steps be taken to commit the local Unionist and Conservative Associations in Scotland to support such a centre party without first assembling a full conference'. But there was so little support that the motion was withdrawn⁽⁵³⁾. Instead at the Central Council of the Unionists in April, a pro-Coalition motion was moved and passed. The full terms of the motion are significant because the motive for cooperation is set out explicitly, and because the Unionists support the maximum cooperation possible:

That this council considers it desirable in our national interests at home and abroad that there should be no cleavage between the Unionists and the National Liberals who have so far loyally cooperated with them, and

52 Western Divisional Council, April 5, 1922.

53 Scottish Unionist Association, Conference, January, 1922.

recognising on the other hand that the time is not yet ripe for any fusion of the party organisations of these two bodies, urgently recommends that the precedent of the Conservatives and Liberal Unionists from 1886 to 1912 be followed, and that the Unionists and National Liberals, while preserving their separate organisations and identities should loyally cooperate in policy and in arrangements as to representation in the country and in Cabinet, as the only possible means of defeating the subversive policy of so called Labour and independent Liberalism and securing the success of a policy that aims at the prosperity of all classes in this country and the Empire as a whole.(54)

The only amendment, to withdraw the Liberal Unionists and Conservative analogy, fell after 'it was pointed out that the terms of the resolution specifically deprecated fusion meanwhile'. But the strength of the resolution suggested that the Unionists would go as near to fusion as was thought practicable. At the meeting Younger urged 'a unanimous verdict in view of the important influence which such a declaration would have'(55).

Moreover though the motion condemned independent Liberalism as well as Labour, the desire for cooperation against socialism in 1922 extended as far as potential pacts with the Asquithians and with Asquith himself. In September the Unionist Party Chairman Sir George Younger reported to John Gilmour that the Liberal, Sir Donald Maclean, had been trying to prevent Liberal opposition to Bonar Law in Glasgow Central constituency in return for a free run for Asquith in Paisley. In fact Maclean had not been successful. Younger felt this was unfortunate although he believed Bonar Law's seat was safe and that as far as Asquith was concerned his view was that 'our people' should 'leave him alone'(56).

54 Minutes of Central Council, April 26, 1922.

55 Ibid.

56 Gilmour Correspondence GD/383./17. Younger to Gilmour, September 12, 1922.

III LIBERAL DISINTEGRATION

While the Conservative Party prospered, the Liberal organisation never recovered its pre-war position. Financially, the position of the Scottish Liberal Federation was to remain desperate. From 2,000 subscribers who met the cost of central organisation, the list fell to 1300 in 1919 and never rose afterwards. Only 1922-23 as we shall see, seemed a reasonable year for the Scottish Liberals. Organisationally the party had problems also. Liberal Constituency Associations had never had strong local organisations between elections. Now in the age of the mass franchise, many associations were moribund; among those which were not, defections from independent Liberalism grew apace, and the splits on policy and attitudes to the Coalition rent the organisation from top to bottom asunder. Four major resignations, engulfed the Scottish Liberal Executive in 1920 and 1921 - including the loss of both Chairman and Vice-Chairman - and were followed by the embarrassing situation of appointing a new Chairman from an organisation that had dissafiliated itself. While there was criticism of the lack of a distinctive Liberal policy and an attempt at a new statement of Liberal aims for Scotland, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that the Liberals were philosophically unequipped for the modern era. The Paisley by-election of 1920 when Asquith was returned to Parliament provided no statement of the Liberal way ahead, as the Midlothian by-election campaign of Gladstone forty years earlier had done, and the most Scottish Liberals were sure of was what they opposed.

The Liberals were to find themselves excluded from all of Scotland's mining and industrial areas throughout the twenties, and they had lost the burghs by 1924. The party never fully reappeared in Glasgow, except when a national Liberal won Partick in 1922, when neither Conservative nor Labour intervened. In Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire and most of Stirlingshire and the industrial areas of Lothian and Fife, the party lost all its roots. In Greenock however, the Liberals did survive, winning in 1922 and

1923 when there was no official Labour candidate, but Collins himself was no great supporter of independent Asquithian Liberalism. Only Leith showed a similar pattern of success. It was won in 1922 and even in the 1927 by-election, when the Labour candidate was regarded as a Communist (the Stirling and Falkirk constituency was won in 1923, but without a Conservative intervention). Paisley was, of course, won in 1920 but held only until 1924.

With these exceptions, Liberalism in Scotland became an entirely rural party - and even in the rural areas it survived less because of its own dynamism and more because either Conservative or Labour failed to appear in successive electoral contests. Ironically, before 1924, the most keenly fought contests in the rural areas were between National Liberal and Liberal. In 1922, no rural seat was won without either Conservative or Labour dropping out. Only Western Isles and Paisley were won in 1923 with Conservative and Labour opponents, in three party contests. Again in 1924, it was only Greenock and Western Isles which were won in three cornered fights. Indeed, seven Liberal losses could be attributed to Labour intervention in 1924, and there were only two seats won by the Liberals in 1924 where there was no Labour candidate - Fife East and Orkney and Shetland. In four seats the Conservatives had dropped out to make possible a clear Liberal run against Labour.

The character of the Liberal Party that won in rural areas needs closer examination. In 1918, it was Coalition Liberalism that won the seats - not independent Liberalism. In 1922 most of the successful Liberal victors were prefixless Liberals who were not Asquithians. In 1923, it was the Lloyd George version of Liberalism that did best. And by 1924 Liberalism was consigned to the outlying areas of Orkney and Shetland, Western Isles, Inverness, Ross and Cromarty, and Caithness and Sutherland.

This parlous electoral performance is the backdrop against which to view the problems of Liberal organisation in the post-1918 period.

In the first years after the war, Liberalism was split asunder by discussions and divisions over Coalition and indeed fusion. From Paisley to the break-up of the Coalition the divisions within the party were never far from the surface.

The immediate repercussion of the 1918 general election was an Indian Summer for Scottish Liberalism - as they won two of the first three by-elections that occurred in Scotland. In April 1919 despite Labour intervention, the Liberals beat a Coalition Liberal candidate in Central Aberdeenshire and in January 1920 they won the Paisley by-election under Asquith. These were to be their only by-election successes before 1922 and they won under conditions that were not conducive to the strength of Liberalism in the future. In April 1919 the party considered Sir Donald Maclean rather than Asquith as a better President of the party in Scotland but agreed to continue with Asquith when Maclean refused the position⁽¹⁾. The Liberal Associations of the East and West were in deep financial troubles, with the Western Federation moving towards support of Coalition Liberalism, and the East reliant on central party grants 'in order to give the association a chance of possibly becoming again self supporting'⁽²⁾. An appeal was issued to old and potentially new members for finance. The party agreed after a discussion of organisation that 'a scheme should be prepared for the better organisation of the party in the East of Scotland'⁽³⁾. One of the upshots of these discussions was a concern that there were insufficient 'trade union and working-class members of Liberal associations', a matter that was referred to the organisation

1 Executive, April 16, 1919.

2 Eastern Finance Committee, May 1, 1919.

3 Eastern Committee, May 1, 1919.

committee. But in 1919 the main hope was that Liberal unity could be maintained despite the coalition and the Annual Report of 1919 strongly believed that the feeling of bitterness would soon disappear⁽⁴⁾.

The Bothwell by-election in July 1919, where a Coalition Liberal stood with the support of both the Liberal and Conservative Associations proved disastrous. In Bothwell the candidate, Moffat, was a lifelong Liberal who stood with Conservative support. He was also supported by the Western Liberal Federation Organising Committee of the Scottish Liberal Federation⁽⁵⁾. But a newly formed Scottish Radical Council urged radical electors to abstain from voting in protest against the cooperation of Liberals and Unionists. They believed 'an advanced radical programme' was essential⁽⁶⁾.

The Radical Council fizzled out and the 1919 local elections demonstrated a drift that the Scottish Liberals were unable to stop even after their attitude to the Coalition hardened in 1921 and 1922. In the elections in which Labour gained 119 seats, swept the board in mining areas, and threatened to gain control of Glasgow, it had only seriously been held back where there were coalition arrangements. In Edinburgh an anti-socialist union prevented Labour from winning a seat. The Scotsman pointed out the implications of these results. Its editorial concluded that the local elections had marked a watershed:

The voting shows that Asquithian Liberalism has no firm foothold between the Coalition and Labour. There is no middle ground for it to occupy where distinctive principles of cardinal importance can be maintained.

4 Executive, SLF, March 25, 1919.

5 Forward, 2 July, 1919.

6 Scotsman, 10 July, 1919.

In Glasgow (as has already been shown) Liberals and Conservatives were now combining to fend off the socialist threat, but under the initiative of the Unionist Party. In these circumstances the Paisley by-election was a very ambiguous assertion of independence. Although Asquith won, the manner of his success demonstrated that coalitionism was strongly embedded in Scotland. While Asquith indicated through Sir Donald Maclean that 'if...invited he would most willingly and very favourably consider the invitation to stand for the constituency', the Paisley Liberal Association which had urged the previous member, Macallum, to support the coalition was by no means united on his adoption⁽⁷⁾. The Paisley Unionist Association had already suggested a coalition, preferably also a local, candidate to stand for both parties in this by-election, and while no meeting had taken place between the two parties, the Liberal Executive had gone so far as to give its 'expression of opinion' that a nominee 'if jointly approved must be a Liberal'⁽⁸⁾. When Asquith's name came forward, the sharp divisions within the Executive were resolved only by calling a meeting of all Association members⁽⁹⁾. It was only by 93 votes to 75 - a decision albeit confirmed by a unanimous vote - that Asquith won the nomination in preference to an Edinburgh advocate who was a Coalitionist⁽¹⁰⁾. In response the Unionists chose a local man, a septuagenarian, the Treasurer of the Burgh Council, who stated clearly that he and the members of his party had 'wanted a straight issue of coalition versus Labour. They had been disappointed in that'. He claimed the Liberals who had been coalition supporters, were 'hypocrites' to choose Asquith⁽¹¹⁾.

7 Scotsman, January 22, 1920.

8 Scotsman, January 20, 1920.

9 Scotsman, January 21, 1920.

10 Scotsman, January 27, 1920. The Unionist Provost of Paisley commented that 'the Unionist Association offered to the Liberal Association their full support if they would bring forward a Liberal Coalition candidate and they promised to work for him with the full strength of their association. That was declined'.

11 Scotsman, January 27, 1920.

By comparison, in Argyll in March, when Sutherland sought re-election as a Coalition Liberal, there were few problems. The local Liberal Association simply supported the Coalitionist MP. Even when Watt, the defeated Liberal member from College in Glasgow, offered himself as an independent candidate, he would have had no official support if he had gone ahead as a candidate. Sutherland was in fact unanimously chosen by the Argyllshire Central Liberal Council and while he was supported by the Unionists, locally and nationally, he also claimed the support of the Scottish Liberal Federation⁽¹²⁾.

Under Liberal standing orders, nominations were a matter for local Liberal Associations and the Scottish Liberal Federation or any other national organisation of the party had no powers to intervene to impose an official Liberal candidate, if that was not what the local association wanted. As long as the standing orders remained unchanged, local Associations could freely support Coalition-minded members, and claim their right to do so under the Liberal Party constitution. During 1919 and 1920 as a result Liberal associations drifted freely to the support of the Coalition - and eventually the National Liberal Party. But if the Liberal Party's rules stifled any direct clash between Liberal supporters and opponents of the Coalition, the party's personalities could not avoid airing their differences in public, especially as Asquith set himself on a strong anti-coalition course on his return to Parliament. He criticised the Coalition's Policy on Irish self-government, and the general course of its foreign policy, and he blamed the Coalition for inflation. After he had turned down an invitation from Lloyd George to discuss Liberal reunion in April 1920 the Scotsman could remark of Scotland: 'The feeling of faction - and it is regrettable that it should be so - is stronger today than it was in December 1918...Liberalism is at the parting of the ways'⁽¹³⁾.

12 Scotsman, February 28, 1920.

13 Scotsman, April 8, 1920.

An open breach had always been likely since mid-1919 when Churchill had floated the idea of a centre party. From December 1919 to March 1920, Lloyd George had held discussions on the possibility of a centre party, and in March and April 1920 Asquith declared war on the Coalition Liberals, committing the party to rival candidatures⁽¹⁴⁾. The two Edinburgh by-elections - in North and South Edinburgh - in April 1920 brought the splits out into the open. In Edinburgh North the Unionists and Coalition Liberals jointly selected a former Unionist candidate and proceeded to form a joint election committee. And even when the Liberals placed Runciman in the field as an independent Liberal, it was alleged by coalitionists that Runciman had been forced on a Liberal constituency party which would have preferred a local candidate who supported the Prime Minister and the Coalition⁽¹⁵⁾. In this fight between a Unionist supported by Coalition Liberals and an independent Liberal, the war of words between both sides of the Liberal forces escalated. The Lord Advocate, Morrison, who was a Coalition supporter, claimed that Asquith had only won the Paisley by-election with Unionist support and that now he was threatening to excommunicate Liberals who supported the Coalition. He went further to claim that Hogge, the Liberal whip, had threatened a Coalition Liberal MP that unless he ceased to support the Coalition, 'he would have the party machine turned against him'. He claimed that 'it was Mr Hogge's intention to have every Scottish Liberal Coalition member turned out of his seat', and finally he saw the decision to place a Liberal candidate in Edinburgh North as 'the first stage of an attack through the party machine upon all Liberals in Scotland who supported the Prime Minister'. That being so, he claimed that:

14 The intricate discussions and negotiations are explained in greater detail in M Cowling, The Impact of Labour, and in lesser detail in T Wilson, op.cit., pp.197-200.

15 Scotsman, March 24, 1920. Lloyd George's joint message of support with Bonar Law claimed that 'there is another candidate whose main stock in trade would appear to be the revival of the dead party'.

'if the ultimate issue came to whether the Liberals in Scotland were to be led by Mr Asquith or Mr Lloyd George, he had no doubt that the decision will be overwhelmingly in favour of Mr Lloyd George'. Hogge's reply was to deny the specific accusation of threatening the Liberal machine would be let loose on Coalition MPs but to equivocate on the more general issue, arguing that 'the Liberals in Scotland would look after the Coalition Liberals in the House of Commons at the next general election without any advice from him' (16).

The by-elections coincided with the publication of the annual report of the Scottish Liberal Federation, which made favourable references to Asquith but excluded praise of Lloyd George or the Coalition Government. It brought an angry response from the Liberal Coalition Whip, Sir William Sutherland. Writing, he said, on behalf of Scottish Coalition MPs, he argued: 'they hesitate to believe that the report is intended to create dissention in the Liberal Party, but there are passages in it and omissions from it, which should not be permitted to go unchallenged'. The Coalition MPs, he said, regretted the failure to mention Liberal successes in pensions, housing and land settlement legislation, and while 'they cordially endorse references in the report to Mr Asquith', they felt that similar references ought to be made to Lloyd George:

They think that Liberal opinion in Scotland is not prepared to destroy the present government...Scottish Liberal members who support the Prime Minister, are anxious to preserve the unity of liberalism in Scotland and to maintain these principles which are common to all Liberals. (17)

16 Scotsman, March 31, 1920. Morrison's reply to Hogge was that the threat had been made against Gardiner, the Perthshire member. See also, Scotsman, April 5, 1920.

17 Scotsman, April 8, 1920.

The splits could no longer be kept to a minimum and engulfed the whole party. The Chairman, Sir William Robertson, had attempted to heal the wounds in the Edinburgh by-elections by arguing that he was 'not aware that the Scottish Liberal Federation has taken up an attitude of hostility towards any Liberal'. Then at the Scottish Liberal Federation's Executive meeting at the end of April, he proposed that the Liberals record their 'firm conviction that a strict adherence to the principles of the Liberal Party was never more needed than now', and call for their application to the problems facing the country. But this compromise proposal - to allow Liberals to continue support for the Coalition - was beaten down with the Executive resolving by 27 votes to 19:

That this meeting of the Scottish Liberal Federation records its strong opposition to any policy that would involve the fusion of Liberal and Unionist Associations, and to any action or proposal directed to that end, and declares that it is essential to the continued existence and usefulness of the Liberal Party and Liberal Associations that Liberals should give full name and unfettered expression to Liberal principles and ideas and avoid all entangling and compromising alliances with the other political parties in the state.(18)

It was this proposal that was put to the Annual Meeting.

The 'anti-fusion' resolution and the controversy over the Annual Report dominated its proceedings, which, as the Chairman reminded delegates, were 'normally confined to strictly business matters'. With all the major Coalition Ministers from Scotland including Churchill present, the Scottish Secretary, Robert Munro, moved 'a reference back' motion on the Annual Report, arguing it was 'a highly ungenerous document':

18 Scottish Liberal Federation, Executive, April 30, 1920.

What they complained of and what they had a right to complain of was the entire absence of any recognition or appreciation of all of the work of the Liberal Prime Minister...The Coalition Government was the first government to take in hand the vital problems of housing and to deal with it in a sound and comprehensive manner...The most radical and far reaching land act...had been passed in modern times.(19)

And he argued that 'the time had not yet come for the resumption of party controversies on pre-war lines and in the meantime their duty was perfectly plain, to go on with the programme of reconstruction now in the process of being carried out and which had received the benediction of Mr Asquith himself'. Others, including McPherson, the solicitor general, and Churchill, urged the same course, but an executive member, Councillor Allan, from Edinburgh led the counter-attack, arguing that the report was 'too moderate...the prime minister had wrecked Liberalism. He did not stop doing so in 1918 but had continued till April 1920. Yet they were asked to send back the report and laud Lloyd George' (20).

By a large majority the reference back motion was defeated. But the Conference ended in confusion when the motion supported by the Executive and which opposed any fusion, was put to the conference. It was defeated by 100 votes to 88, allowing the Coalition Whip Sutherland to claim that 'the outstanding fact was that a resolution condemning the coalition was defeated'. The Scotsman's Political Correspondent agreed that this was the mood of the meeting:

Coalition Liberalism in Scotland will be all the stronger and healthier for yesterday...the meeting was a warning to the extremists that the coalition had got more friends in the federation than they calculated...It was in point

19 Scotsman, May 3, 1920.

20 Ibid.

of fact not an anti-coalition resolution at all. It was an anti-fusion resolution. Yet it was lost 100 votes to 88. The extremists who drew it up over-reached themselves and instead of submitting to a defeat on simple cooperation between the parties have engineered inferential approval for a policy of fusion.(21)

That interpretation was hotly disputed, not least by letters to the Scotsman in response, with Professor Keith, a well known Scottish Liberal academic, arguing that 'the deliberate opinion of the federation can only be arrived at after a full examination of the position by the affiliated associations, few of which have as yet had occasion to adopt a definite attitude to the issue'(22).

Asquith's response was unequivocal. 'The suggested movement in the direction of fusion', he told Glasgow University Liberal Club on 21 May 1920, 'had been unhesitatingly repudiated by every Liberal organisation in the country. The repudiation had begun in Scotland, in Glasgow in fact, and carried out South of the border'. He continued: 'The Tory was to cease fighting the Liberal, and the Liberal was to cease fighting the Tory, and each was to put his vote at the disposal of the other when and only when a Labour candidate came into the field...The Tories were assured of a majority and that what the Liberals as a party were asked to do was to commit political suicide...that was what fusion meant when translated into political practice'(23).

Following the conference decision, and Asquith's statement, the Scottish Liberal Office-Bearers could not find any formula for consensus. The first stage was the resignation of Mrs Waddell, a Vice-Chairman, 'on account of the views given out in the last

21 Scotsman, May 3, 1920.

22 Ibid.

23 Glasgow Herald, May 22, 1920.

annual report and those that had been taken up by the majority of the executive at the last annual meeting'. She argued that there was no longer 'equality of expression' of the different Liberal wings. Her resignation was accepted by 21 votes to 5 and again an attempt from the Chair to conciliate met with little success. Sir William Robertson proposed that they write to the Liberal Coalition Whip to ascertain whether it was his intention that seats held by Unionists would be contested by Liberals at the next general election. But the Executive could not agree to do this and 'as there was considerable differences of opinion regarding the suggestion it was dropped',⁽²⁴⁾.

Events nationally were forcing Scottish Liberals to clarify their position. In May the Lloyd George Liberals had walked out of the National Conference of the Liberal Party and steps were being taken to form a National Liberal Organisation. In Scotland, the Executive now found that 'it was difficult to get speakers into certain constituencies, especially those that had coalition Liberal members',⁽²⁵⁾.

While the Executive felt that 'with a little more time matters would settle down' and that the main need was to set up a special committee to lead to a new statement of policy, the policy-making conference of the Scottish Liberals in October could not avoid a new debate on the party's divisions. The Conference in Ayr had four different proposals before it. Cathcart Liberals expressed confidence in the coalition government; North Edinburgh Liberals expressed no confidence. A motion from Clackmannan and East Stirling rejected fusion, while one from Partick urged there be no interference with local Liberal Associations. First, the 'North Edinburgh motion was passed by 150 votes to only 31 for the

24 Scottish Liberal Federation, Executive, June 29, 1920.

25 Ibid., July 29, 1920.

Cathcart proposal. Then in the debate on fusion and independence, the Partick Liberals urged that Conference 'decline to interfere with local associations in the matter of selection or joint action with other bodies for selection purposes'; but the Clackmannan motion calling for new candidates who supported an independent Liberal programme was 'carried by a large majority',⁽²⁶⁾. On the next day Conference passed a motion congratulating Asquith and other independent Liberals on their criticism of the government 'where they failed to meet the requirements',⁽²⁷⁾.

The task for the Liberal Office-Bearers was clear-cut. In pursuance of the conference decisions, a letter was sent to associations 'to ascertain what was being done in the various constituencies', and arrangements were made to draw up a new statement of rules for local associations⁽²⁸⁾. But the decisions could not bind the existing office-bearers together, and first the Chairman of the Scottish Liberals, Sir William Robertson, and then the Chairman of the Eastern Committee, Sir Robert Lockhart, tendered their resignations. Robertson who had been President for eight years had hoped, he said, that the 'Liberals would stand together' and could not accept 'a determination to force existing differences to the point where a split in the party becomes inevitable'. Lockhart argued that he had always discouraged and opposed every attempt to divide the Liberal Party forever. Going back into history, he said that he had 'deplored the secession of the Liberal Unionists and when an attempt had been made to form...a Liberal League, he resisted the effort in his area'. In his view 'the selection of candidates rested entirely with the local associations', and the Ayr decisions marked 'a breakaway from our Liberal traditions',⁽²⁹⁾.

26 Scotsman, October 15, 1920.

27 Ibid., October 16, 1920.

28 Scottish Liberal Association, Eastern Organising Committee, November 6, 1920.

29 Ibid.

Two meetings of the Scottish Executive were convened to persuade Robertson and Lockhart to consider their decisions. Robertson informed the executive that 'he was strongly opposed to the setting up of a rival Liberal organisation in Scotland', claiming 'he had condemned in conversation with the Prime Minister and Sir William Sutherland and in letters couched in the strongest possible language their policy in this connection'. The stumbling-block, however, was the implementation of the Clackmannan resolution which had opposed fusion; in spite of the anxiety to find a compromise, the special executive meeting on 6 December, with Robertson and Lockhart in attendance, had to accept that 'the Ayr resolutions made it quite clear that the Federation could not in any way support Coalition Liberal candidates'. While Robertson accepted this interpretation, he felt that by refusing to support the action of local associations (the point upon which he felt most strongly) the Federation was 'running the great danger of causing these associations to break away'. But the Executive believed that it could not depart from the Conference decision, 'it could not support coalition Liberal candidates'. Lockhart's position was more clear cut. He had already told the Kirkcaldy Liberals in his constituency, that 'while he retained his freedom to vote against the government in any measure brought forward that infringed Liberal ideas', he had agreed as an MP to give it general support; he felt that the divisions within the Liberal Party were quite simple irresoluble⁽³⁰⁾.

With Lockhart and Robertson's resignations now final, and the embarrassing appointment of a new Chairman from a disaffiliated organisation - Montrose - the Executive of the Scottish Liberal Federation issued its new statement of policy in January 1921.

30 Scottish Liberal Association, Executive, December 6, 1920.

While previously, it said, local organisations could expect their candidates to be automatically supported, there had been 'developments which have made it necessary for the Federation to consider its position with regard to its policy'⁽³¹⁾. While one factor was that Coalition Liberal MPs had supported Unionists against Liberal candidates, the setting up of the National Liberal Council was the main problem. Although it only took root in 1921 and 1922,⁽³²⁾ Lloyd George had been setting up a rival organisation, from the middle of 1920, and dividing the Scottish party, as the statement made clear:

The Council is endeavouring to influence and control certain Liberal associations which are affiliated to the Federation, and is setting up Coalition Liberal Committees in constituencies in which there are already Liberal associations. The object of this can only be to oppose Liberal candidates selected by Liberal Associations and to cooperate with the Unionists. There are other indications which point to a determined effort on the part of coalition Liberals to destroy the influence of the Federation. It is known that attempts have been made to detach from the Federation certain officials by offers of better financial terms. One of these attempts was successful.⁽³³⁾

The Federation had therefore, the statement made clear, to adopt a new policy towards its local associations:

The Federation cannot interfere with the action of any local association or enforce any recommendation and it has no intention of trying to do so. At the same time the Executive feel that it cannot be expected in view of the developments which have been referred to, and the declared policy of the General Council at Ayr, to support Coalition Liberal candidates while the Coalition Liberal organisation and committee cooperate with Unionists in supporting Unionist candidates in opposition to independent Liberal candidates.⁽³⁴⁾

31 Scottish Liberal Federation, Statement, January 1921.

32 The detailed negotiations are set out in M Kinnear, The Fall of Lloyd George, (London, 1975). However, an account in less detail is given in T Wilson, The Downfall of the Liberal Party, p.200-201.

33 Scottish Liberal Association, Statement, January, 1921.

34 Ibid.

While the Federation still hoped coalition Liberal members would return 'to a free Liberal Party', this was now unlikely and 'it is not a question of a difference between Liberals holding advanced and moderate views but a question as to whether or not the Liberal Party is to continue to exist as an independent political force',⁽³⁵⁾.

So it was that the Liberals' new rules specifically insisted on the independence of the Liberal Party from coalition arrangements. But it was not clear how far the Liberal Associations at the grass roots would go in supporting this position. Reporting to the Eastern Organising Committee in July 1921, Webster, the organising secretary, identified four classes of constituency with different attitudes to free and coalition Liberals. Apart from constituencies supporting the party line outright, there were, he said, nine constituencies where the free Liberals had a majority, although there were members who were coalition supporters still in the Association. There were six associations where the local Liberals blatantly ignored the new rules (seven, if Kircaldy was included) and these were distinctly pro-Coalition. One association, Montrose, had definitely severed its connection with the Federation. In these constituencies where Coalition views predominated, free Liberals, he said, 'preferred to carry on in their own way for some time', and it was resolved that the Secretary was to keep in contact with them. It was felt difficult to do anything else unless the affiliation of coalition Liberals' constituencies was cancelled⁽³⁶⁾.

Nearly a year later the situation was no better. Only twenty-six associations had approved of the new rules. In seven constituencies no meetings had been held to discuss the rules, and

35 Ibid.

36 Scottish Liberal Federation, Eastern Organising Committee, July 1921.

three - Dundee, Bridgeton and Inverness - had rejected the rules⁽³⁷⁾. The situation was clearer but no more encouraging by the end of 1922, at the time of the election. In all, three constituencies had severed their connection with the Federation as a result of the Ayr decision and another three had gone as a result of the new rules. One had decided simply to support the Coalition. Ten associations had not replied to the central circular, despite being reminded on this 'that if no reply was received within three weeks it would be taken for granted that associations had decided to detach themselves from the Federation'. Four constituencies had given 'indefinite replies'. While it was agreed that 'no hasty action should be taken', the situation was lamentable. Twenty-eight constituencies were not in compliance with the rules of the Federation and had detached themselves, disbanded, or supported National Liberal organisations⁽³⁸⁾. From an examination of the position it seems seventeen had simply gone over to the National Liberals one of them, Kirkcaldy, remained firmly in the National Liberal camp although it had not been expelled. In only half of these areas had a new Liberal organisation been formed⁽³⁹⁾. Almost without exception these were the seats which had Coalition Liberal Members in 1918 and were to return National Liberal members in 1922 and in only five of them did a Liberal candidate appear in the field, all of them significantly in constituencies where new Liberal Associations had been formed.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 The Liberal Associations that apparently went over to the National Liberals were: East Aberdeenshire (June 16, 1922), Inverness (June 22, 1922), Dundee (June 22, 1922), Bridgeton (June 22, 1922), Kinross and West Perthshire, Haddington and Berwickshire (July 14, 1921), Partick (October 10, 1921), Argyle (October 10, 1921), Dumbarton Burghs (October 10, 1921), Dunfermline (July 12, 1923), Kirkcaldy (July 13, 1923), West Renfrew (October 10, 1921), Ross and Cromarty (December 8, 1922), Cathcart (December 8, 1922), and Banff (July 25, 1922). In Banff, Inverness, Dundee, Montrose, Partick, Argyll, Dumbarton, West Renfrew and Ross and Cromarty new Liberal Associations were formed and in Moray and Nairn the decision to leave was rescinded. Dates in brackets are meetings of Scottish Liberal Association Committees when information was revealed. 211

If any indication be needed of the depths to which Liberalism had already fallen by the time of the 1922 election, the party's performance in by-elections in 1921 and 1922 provides it. Despite the Liberal decision to opt for independence in the autumn of 1920, they were unable to place a candidate in the Kirkcaldy by-election of 1921, failed to win in the Inverness by-election of 1922, and then decided not to intervene in the Moray and Nairn by-election later in the year.

The Kirkcaldy by-election proved to be a death blow for Liberalism in the industrial areas. When Lockhart was chosen as Liberal candidate, he was given immediate support by the Kirkcaldy Unionist Association⁽⁴⁰⁾ in December 1920. As he was to tell electorates during the by-election early in 1921:

I am standing in this election as a Liberal and as a supporter of Mr Lloyd George, whom I have always supported as a Liberal, and whom I hold as a Liberal today and has always been. That of course implies that I am a supporter of Mr Lloyd George's Government. I support that Government as a constitutionalist because I am a strong believer in the freedom of the individual and the freedom of industry. I am standing in opposition to socialists who would make the individual a mere machine.⁽⁴¹⁾

While there were Asquithians in the Kirkcaldy Liberal Party, the Scotsman reported none seemed keen to stand against Lockhart or support an independent candidate. In these circumstance the Scottish Liberal Federation was largely powerless. Its General Secretary, Webster, said:

If there is any reasonably strong feeling amongst the independent Liberals in the Burghs regarding a candidate, then there are friends willing to consider the question of an invitation. There is no desire, however, to

40 Scotsman, February 24, 1921.

41 Ibid., March 17, 1921.

interfere in any way unless those who support free Liberalism in the constituency desire to see their views set forth in the contest. I feel I should let you know that our position here is that, if any request were made, we would certainly in view of the decision come to at Ayr, help those who were anxious to have their case stated before the electorate.⁽⁴²⁾

Mason, previously MP for Tradeston, was prepared to come forward as Liberal candidate, a prospect which worried Lockhart who 'could hardly conceive it possible that his friends of the Scottish Liberal Federation from which he parted a month ago on the most friendly terms would send any Liberal candidate to oppose him in Kirkcaldy Burghs or that any of the Office-Bearers would approve such action',⁽⁴³⁾ Webster replied that the Federation had never given any assurance it would not intervene, and indeed that 'the whole difference between Sir Robert Lockhart and his colleagues was round this very point of not assisting Coalition Liberal candidates'. He stated that the Federation wanted to see the implementation of this Ayr decision and an independent Liberal candidate and programme supported by the Liberal Association or any representative body of independent Liberal opinion. Mason, however, in the end, stood down from the contest and⁽⁴⁴⁾ Lockhart's nomination papers were signed by the Vice-President of the local Liberal Association, by the Unionist Chairman and former Unionist candidate, Sir Michael Nairn⁽⁴⁵⁾.

42 Ibid., February 19, 1921.

43 Scotsman, February 18, 1921.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid., February 25, 1921.

The Unionist Association issued a statement to 'earnestly urge upon the Unionist electors in the present circumstances that it is their duty to give all support they can to Sir Robert Lockhart just as if he had been a Unionist Candidate'. This appeal was backed up by letters from both Lloyd George and Bonar Law⁽⁴⁶⁾. The only saving feature from the Liberal viewpoint was that Lockhart refused to stand as a Coalition candidate despite being asked by the Unionist Association to term himself such. He replied that he was a Liberal and 'could not abjure his political faith or renounce his political principles'.

Lockhart advocated social reform while at the same time denouncing Kennedy, the Labour candidate, who was also Secretary of the Social Democratic Federation, as a revolutionary. But Labour won. Lockhart put down his defeat to an Irish vote of 2,000 mobilised against him (a conclusion partly justified by Kennedy who spoke of his victory as a 'message of hope to the Irish people') and to the cooperative and mining vote turning against him. Unemployment, he said, 'had a detrimental effect on his cause' and he argued that stories propagated about taxing coop dividends had had an effect⁽⁴⁷⁾. But the truth was that there was little Liberal organisation to talk of in the constituency. As Lloyd George was informed, it was especially weak in the mining areas of Methil and Dysart and in the industrial villages⁽⁴⁸⁾.

46 Scotsman, 2 March, 1921.

47 Scotsman, March 5, 1921.

48 Lloyd George papers F 22/3/37, report of James Parker MP, on Kirkcaldy by-election, cited in C Cook, op.cit., p.36.

In Kirkcaldy no independent Liberal had stood but a year later in Inverness, Liberal and National Liberal fought each other. The Inverness Liberal Association had given support to Lloyd George and their candidate came forward on a Coalition-Liberal ticket. The Liberal Federation through the Fort William Liberal Association placed Livingston in the field. He had Webster, the Scottish Secretary, directing his campaign, with Lord Gladstone in support⁽⁴⁹⁾.

Sir Donald Maclean spoke of the Inverness by-election as 'the death knell of Coalition Liberalism in the North'. He felt it showed, that as the Liberal Unionists had been swallowed up by the Conservatives' that exactly the same 'was happening to the Coalition Liberals', yet the Liberals had lost the contest, and when a by-election came in Moray and Nairn, the Eastern Committee found that: 'many good free Liberals had committed themselves a year ago to the Coalition candidate and felt they could not oppose him in the by-election. The Federation drew some comfort from the belief that free Liberals were determined to unite together for the purpose of adopting an independent candidate for the general election'⁽⁵⁰⁾. In these circumstances the Coalition Candidate was returned unopposed.

Divided over their attitudes to the Coalition and future cooperation with the Unionists, the Liberals were unable to develop a distinctive set of policies while in opposition between 1918 and 1922. A Scottish Federation policy statement of January 1921 was vague, stressing the need for a compromise between laissez faire

49 Scotsman, March 1,2,3, 1922.

50 Scottish Liberal Federation, Eastern Committee, June 16, 1921.

and collectivism, arguing for retrenchment and thus appearing to support public spending cuts, supporting an ill-defined capital levy, and advocating public ownership in certain cases of monopolies. It was middle way between Labour and Conservatism but too ill-defined to suggest a party manifesto⁽⁵¹⁾. At the British Liberal Conference in Nottingham later in 1921, the party went further, supporting legislation for minimum wages and maximum hours in industry, an extension of unemployment insurance and the recall of the National Industrial Conference⁽⁵²⁾. But in Scotland, while a committee was set up in 1920 to prepare a new statement of Liberal policy, little came of it, and discussions in conference and private party committee were dominated by which attitudes to take to the Coalition Government and its policy and actions.

If Labour in Parliament was a disappointment, so too were the Liberal Parliamentarians. One assessment was that they were 'not a significant or influential group in the sessions of 1919 and 1920'⁽⁵³⁾. Much was expected from the re-election of Asquith to Parliament early in 1920. From the middle of 1919 Elibank, the former Liberal Chief Whip, spoke for many Liberals when he urged upon Sir Donald Maclean, the Parliamentary Leader that: 'Asquith must take up the running not on sectional and old party controversial lines, but pointing out in his own inimitable manner the broad road which the country must travel if it is to avoid disintegration and damnation.' That, he said, would bring a 'resurrection of the Liberal Party'. Writing directly to Asquith

51 K O Morgan, Consensus and Disunity: The Lloyd George Coalition Government, 1918-1922, Oxford (1979) p.203.

52 Ibid., p.203-4.

53 Ibid., p.194.

he warned at the same time that: 'very candidly I do not think that the country will listen a moment to what we call the Liberal creed, and the applause of the stalwarts may be mistaken for the voice of the multitude'. Elibank did admit that free trade might be one issue on which the Liberal Party might be reborn,⁽⁵⁴⁾ but he also urged Asquith to concentrate his attention on the main issue of the day, the relations between capital and labour, rather than on the old issues dear to the Liberal hearts⁽⁵⁵⁾. The policy, he said, should be opposition to the control of industries and to unconstitutional methods of Government.

But the real Liberal problem was that the Party could not put forward a position that distinguished them clearly enough from the Coalition on the one hand and the Labour Party on the other. When Asquith stood in the Paisley by-election of 1920, he failed to put forward a programme that revitalised Scottish Liberalism and his subsequent parliamentary performance was disappointing⁽⁵⁶⁾. Indeed he seemed to satisfy no-one. Although he supported cuts in spending, he did not go far enough as an anti-waste candidate to satisfy, for example, Rothermere, who had supported him in Paisley⁽⁵⁷⁾. Nor did he satisfy his traditional Liberal

54 Elibank to Asquith, June 22, 1919, Elibank Papers. Also Elibank to Maclean, June 10, 1919, quoted by Matthew, McKibbin and Kay, op.cit., p.749. 'Many a malcontent will join the Free Trade Cause but not the old Liberal Party...The old party cries are out of date and only confusing and embarrassing'.

55 Ibid., June 22, 1919.

56 J Kelley, Asquith at Paisley, Journal of British Studies, IV, No. 1, 1964, pp.

57 Rothermere to Elibank, December 22, 1919, Elibank Papers. 'I have been wondering why I supported Asquith at Paisley....I do not wish to be impatient but if your old friend is so oblivious to what is the only great issue in the country today he cannot get and will not get further press support. You know what this means in the West of Scotland'.

supporters. By the end of 1920, Elibank was stating that Asquith had 'entirely failed to come up to expectations',⁽⁵⁸⁾ and Gray was arguing that 'Asquith cuts no ice'. This feeling was not to change in the two years before the election of 1922. In September 1922, when the Unionists were discussing giving Asquith a clear run against Labour in his Paisley constituency, Younger was to dismiss Asquith's importance; 'I am perfectly certain', he wrote to Sir John Gilmour, 'his party will do no good as long as he is head of it',⁽⁵⁹⁾.

By the time of the 1922 election the Liberals still lacked a strong distinctive policy which set them apart from the other parties, and the evidence of finance and organisation shows that they had failed to modernise their political machinery in the way the Conservatives had done. The emphasis remained on subscribers, rather than members: on local organisation rather than central direction; and unlike the Conservatives who forced their local parties to try to attract working-class members, the Liberals left the initiative to the local associations. In writing of the post-war Liberal Party, Matthew, McKibbin and Kay have argued that: 'its failure lay partly in its attitude to the political community and the nature of its political organisation. This is seen at two levels, in the reluctance of the Liberals to take electoral organisation seriously and more widely in their incapacity to make the necessary demagogic appeals to the mass electorate created by the 1918 Act',⁽⁶⁰⁾ Sir Donald Maclean, one of the party's leading members, had been warned that the party must develop a membership structure, a tighter central organisation and a staff of full-time agents who worked between as well as at election times⁽⁶¹⁾. But there is no evidence in Scotland that any action was contemplated until Lloyd George took over the party machine in 1926. By then it was too late.

58 A C Murray's Diary, 23 December 1920, Elibank Papers.

59 Younger to Gilmour, September 27, 1922. GD.383/17. Gilmour Papers.

60 Matthew McKibbin and Kay, op.cit., p.741-2.

61 Letter in Maclean correspondence cited in Matthew, McKibbin and Kay, op.cit., p.742.

CHAPTER 4

THE 1922 ELECTION

I THE END OF COALITION?

According to Walter Elliot, later a Scottish Secretary, it was 'in 1922 the new line up in Parliament took place. The hard unyielding struggle has gone on since then. The political tenacity has been great and the changes have been slight'. 1922 was in fact the election in which Labour became the largest party in Scotland, gaining one third of the votes and twenty-nine of seventy-one seats. It also foreshadowed what was to happen two years later, with the Conservatives establishing themselves firmly as the alternative party of the right. But even if Labour had obviously arrived, the pattern of politics did not seem as firmly set as it actually was. Twenty Labour and Conservative seats would not change hands again in the nineteen twenties. However, many on the right expected renewal of a coalition or at least further electoral arrangements between the groups of the right. Only in retrospect did the 1922 election seem as critical as it in fact was.

Labour's 1922 results were actually less impressive than their performance in local elections and indeed by-elections in the years before 1922. Labour did not fight eight of the constituencies it had contested in 1918 or in later by-elections for that Parliament, and another fourteen seats were not fought either in 1918 or 1922. Perhaps Labour's problems in 1922 were best summed up by James Maxton, their Bridgeton candidate, reflecting on the local elections just before the announcement of the 1922 general election:

The morale of the working class has been lowered by the humiliation of their position and by grim want. The fight has lacked the courage and vigour shown by men sure of victory, and despair and hopelessness generally has taken the edge off the socialist sword. An apathetic

half-hearted defensive must be turned into a vigorous and courageous offensive...to achieve the spirit of the pioneers of thirty years ago.(1)

So weak in fact was the Labour Party in Scotland that the 1922 election success came largely through a combined effort by the Independent Labour Party and the miners.

But if Labour did not seem as strong as it proved to be, the same was true of Conservatism. The 1922 election was fought by the political right on an anti-socialist platform, and in Scotland there was little Conservative enthusiasm for 'going it alone', despite the fact that the new Premier was a Scots Conservative M.P. It proved possible to construct alliances between Conservatives and National Liberals, and in many constituencies the Liberal organisation was so weak and insecure that it had become a National Liberal party, or those who controlled it quite simply were reluctant to challenge other right wing candidates. Labour fought only forty-three constituencies in 1922 but, despite the existence of three parties to Labour's right, there were twenty-four seats where only one candidate opposed the socialist. There were seventeen Conservative candidates with Liberal support, twenty-four 'National' Liberals with Conservative support, and even two independent Liberals with Conservative (and National Liberal) support. It was primarily in the constituencies where Labour was absent that Liberal fought Conservative - twelve seats in all - and National Liberal fought Liberal - eleven seats in all. There were only two constituencies in which National Liberals and Conservatives could not agree - and fought each other. In these circumstances it was a measure of Labour's arrival that it could win thirteen seats in three cornered contests, and sixteen in two cornered fights. Most of these seats it was to hold throughout the twenties and, with the exception of the 1931 election, for the next sixty years.

1 Forward, September 23, 1922.

There was no enthusiasm in Scotland for abandoning the Lloyd George Coalition. The decision to do so was made on 19 October in face of advice from Scotland that opposed any change and with only five Scottish Conservatives - Bonar Law, Kidd, Gideon Murray, Adair and Sprot - in favour of the break with Lloyd George.⁽²⁾ It was, said the Scotsman, in patriotic rhetoric, a revolt in the English constituencies that had deprived Scotland of the government it required⁽³⁾. Only three Scottish M.P.'s were members of the Unionist 'Diehard' group and in Scotland the 'Diehard' conservative element was not important; the threat of socialism was the issue which should unite the right, said the Scotsman:

In Scotland this 'diehard' element need not be a disturbing factor. Revolutionary socialism may gain where reaction loses and to combat this growing menace is a task surely in which Unionists and National Liberals can cooperate without qualification or reservation. It is the line marked out moreover by the clearest of signs for party divisions in the future. More and more the old issues recede into the background and revolutionary socialism emerges as the vital field of conflict.⁽⁴⁾

In congratulating Derby on his advice to continue a Liberal-Conservative pact in Lancashire, it pointed out that it had urged 'the same counsel upon Scottish Unionists ever since the rupture took place',⁽⁵⁾ and its editorial of 26th October argued that, 'Scottish Unionists as a body do not approve of the Carlton Club decision though they accept it. They regret that the majority of the party in England decided to break with the National Liberals and they are resolved that cooperation in Scotland shall continue no matter what happens across the Border'. Bonar Law, the editorial

2 M Kinnear, op.cit., pp.222-242.

3 Scotsman, October, 23, 1922.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid., October 30, 1922.

said, must keep in mind that 'the desire of the Scottish Unionism was and continues to be an understanding with the National Liberals such as existed at one time between the Conservatives and the Liberal Unionists when the two parties though maintaining separate organisations agreed not to oppose one another locally'⁽⁶⁾.

The Scotsman reflected a mood traced in Chapter 3 that had existed since 1918 and had been confirmed throughout 1922. Many Unionists regretted the failure to agree to a joint candidature with the Liberals even in the Paisley by-election and had advised giving Asquith a free run⁽⁷⁾; while there had been disagreements with the independent Liberals in the two Edinburgh by-elections of 1920, there had been a united front in the Kirkcaldy by-election of 1921. Even with the failure of fusion, it had been generally accepted that the Coalition's two wings would not fight each other. As early as May 1922 the Hamilton Conservatives had unanimously agreed to coalesce in future elections with the Liberals,⁽⁸⁾ and the Conservative desire to continue coalition arrangements can be seen most obviously in the cases of St. Rollox and Cathcart where the local party members were not so united. The Conservative Central Council for Scotland had agreed in April 1922 that arrangements between National Liberals and Conservatives be maintained and while, it said, the time was not ripe for fusion, it 'urgently recommends' that 'the precedent of the Conservative and Liberal

6 Ibid, October 26, 1922

7 Forward, December 2, 1921. Sir John McLeod, MP for Kelvingrove had for example argued that 'what was wanted above all things was a united front'.

8 Ibid, May 27, 1922.

Unionists from 1886 to 1912 be followed'⁽⁹⁾. This was the background to the by-elections which threatened in Scotland on the eve of the General Election of 1922. While in Inverness there was some discussion in 1921 of 'the position of a Unionist candidate in the event of the Lord Advocate vacating the seat', the local party had suggested no more than 'stimulating fresh efforts' in organisation 'after the shooting season' but 'only so far as it is judicious to do so without upsetting the coalition Liberals'⁽¹⁰⁾. In the event the Invernessshire by-election was to see a Conservative-backed coalition Liberal candidate who defeated the Liberal⁽¹¹⁾. Equally in Moray and Nairn where the seat became vacant in June 1922, the Conservatives allowed a coalition Liberal candidate a clear run. There the Unionists had decided earlier that all that was required was an organising secretary 'in order that the full strength of unionism on which the coalition Liberals must depend for the greater part of their support may be available'⁽¹²⁾. So strong was the mood for cooperation early in October 1922 that not only Asquith but Sir John Gilmour had even considered supporting an independent Liberal, Chapple, whose support for mines and rail nationalisation had not even endeared him to Liberal leaders. Chapple had been chosen by the Liberals in Dumfries as the successor to the Coalition M.P., William Murray. But Austen Chamberlain persuaded Gilmour that: 'you must support our Unionist candidate but upon terms. If he comes out as a diehard in opposition to the Leaders of the Party I do not think he has any

9 SUA Central Council, April 26, 1922.

10 SUA Eastern Executive, September, 21, 1921.

11 The result was Sir M Macdonald, (Co.Lib.) 8340: A Livingston (Lib.) 8024. The by-election was held on March 16, 1922.

12 SUA Eastern Executive, September 21, 1921.

right to call for your assistance',⁽¹³⁾.

As the Scottish Conservatives put into practice the decision that there would be coalition arrangements in Scotland, they came under little pressure from the national party to change their mind even after the Carlton Club decision. Younger's letter from Conservative Central Office in London which informed constituency Unionist parties there was no centrally arranged pact, did not go to Scottish constituencies. It was this letter which fired a spate of Conservative interventions in seats held by many Coalition Liberals in England, but according to the Times the Unionist headquarters had positively advised the continuation of Scottish coalition pacts⁽¹⁴⁾. Certainly the advice from Scotland's leading politicians at Westminster was clear. The key figures were Sir Robert Horne and Sir John Gilmour, both of whom had been Coalition Government Ministers and had supported the continuation of the coalition. Gilmour's advice was crystal clear, when he spoke at a Scottish Unionist Association luncheon, a week after the Carlton Club decision. He said that:

For the past few years as a whip of the party and leader of the organisation in Scotland he had worked steadily to secure for his party as great a measure of representation in the House of Commons and in the deliberations of the country as he thought it possible to do and he should regret exceedingly if all that work were to be upset today, and if they were to fight amongst themselves or with moderate opinion in the country.....there were those in the country who by some wild measures would wreck the foundations of constitutional government as they know and understood it. There were no great and abiding principles which divided themselves and the National Liberals.⁽¹⁵⁾

13 Austen Chamberlain to Gilmour, Gilmour Correspondence, October 7, 1922. GD/383/15.

14 Times, November 1, 1922.

15 Scotsman, October 28, 1922.

The position of Gilmour, the Unionist Whip in Scotland, in the events of 1922 is crucial. With the fall of the Coalition, Gilmour, who had supported Austen Chamberlain, told his constituency Party, 'The point at issue....is that we believe that some form of cooperation is essential during and after the election....we see the gravest objection to shutting out the possibility of working usefully with the coalition Liberals and even with Mr Lloyd George either as Prime Minister or in another capacity',⁽¹⁶⁾. It was this support for Lloyd George and coalition arrangements that brought Gilmour, Horne and the younger M.P. Walter Elliot to attend Austen Chamberlain's pro-Coalition dinner in October, and to sign a declaration opposing the Conservatives' ingratitude to Lloyd George and the Coalition Liberals⁽¹⁷⁾. Gilmour who in his election address sought to 'be free to resume cooperation with....moderate parties in the state',⁽¹⁸⁾ also rejected an invitation to be Scottish Secretary, despite the advice of Sir George Younger that 'it is ludicrous for you not to come into the new Government....I have it in my pocket for you if you like',⁽¹⁹⁾. In the event Bonar Law defused some of the controversy over the position by appointing the Liberal Viscount Novar to the post. But it appears it was agreed with Austen Chamberlain that Gilmour's and the Conservative coalitionists' attitude to Scottish seats should be based on three principles:

1. I shall of course comply with [writing unclear] practically all pledges given to Scottish Unionists and I shall supply the usual Central Office help.

16 Gilmour to constituency Chairman, October 21, 1922, Gilmour Papers, GD/383/15.

17 Scotsman, October 23, 1922

18 Gilmour, Election Address, GD/383/17 Gilmour Papers.

19 Younger to Gilmour, October 21, GD/383/17, Gilmour Papers.

2. I shall support Unionist candidates wherever they are opposing or opposed by 'Wee Frees' or Labour.
3. I cannot support and as far as influence goes I must....avoid any attack on Coalition Liberal seats.(20)

The Scottish Unionists were more in tune with Gilmour; on 27 October, when the Central Council of the Scottish Conservative Party finally met to consider its position in the light of the Carlton Club decision it had before it three motions which in the words of their Chairman, Sir John Hope, had been 'carefully drafted and approved by the leaders of the Party in Scotland' ⁽²¹⁾. While a prior meeting arranged for the 23rd had been cancelled, he said 'it now seemed desirable to convene at short notice' ⁽²²⁾. The first motion simply congratulated Bonar Law on his elevation to the position of Prime Minister. The second and third motions were to express support for Austen Chamberlain, the Coalitionist. The second motion which, like the third, had already been supported publicly by Elliot, Buchanan, Watson, Baird, McLaren, Mackinder, Younger and McLeod among the leading Conservative dignatories in Scotland, embodied the key decision: 'The Council recommends that in order to further a policy which must commend itself to all moderate opinion, nothing be done to impair every possible cooperation with the National Liberals and in this matter the advice of the Unionist leaders be followed that all arrangements between Unionists and National Liberals working together in the various constituencies be scrupulously adhered to' ⁽²³⁾.

20 Document written on No.11 Downing Street notepaper, contained in Gilmour papers GD/383/17.

21 Scottish Unionist Association, Central Council, October 27, 1922.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

It was passed unanimously, and it was also a measure of the continued desire for cooperation from the Conservative rank and file that a motion from the floor was presented and agreed, which read: 'This council desires to record its high appreciation of the distinguished service which Mr Lloyd George has rendered to the country in peace and war'⁽²⁴⁾.

The Scottish Council decision was supported by similar initiatives by Western and Eastern Divisional Councils. In the East where there seemed less need for a united front against socialism, the mood was still clearly for cooperation, and the Eastern Divisional Council decided that 'in pursuance of the advice of our leader and thus to prevent a division or a cleavage in the moderate vote, the council recommends that sitting National Liberal members and National Liberal candidates should be supported and no unionist candidate be put forward against them, in the understanding that there is a reciprocal action on the part of the National Liberals towards sitting Unionist members seeking re-election and unionist candidates jointly adopted'⁽²⁵⁾. Earlier the Western Divisional Council had agreed a similar proposal, that sitting National Liberal M.P.'s and National Liberals jointly adopted by Unionists and National Liberals should be supported and in these cases no Unionist candidate entered⁽²⁶⁾.

The National Liberals responded quickly and positively to these decisions. The Western Executive of the Scottish National Liberal Council agreed to recommend 'the honourable observance of all electoral arrangements with the Unionist divisional associations', and where none existed it wished to make arrangements 'to prevent

24 Ibid.

25 Scotsman, October 28, 1922.

26 Ibid., October 27, 1922.

the loss of any seat at present held by either party'. In Glasgow a joint manifesto was issued by Unionists and National Liberals, with a list of official candidates. Outside Glasgow, the policy was 'the fullest observance of all local electoral arrangements made between the divisional organisations' (27).

Horne was a leading advocate of Coalitionism and a moving force behind its retention at the 1922 election. He argued his case forcibly:

The old party issues are at least for the moment in abeyance. The questions in controversy are social and economic rather than of a party character. And the real enemy, the real opponents of the views which we hold, are to be found not in the ranks either of the Unionists or National Liberals but in the ranks of those who wish to subvert the whole of the present fabric of society and to set up a new system....I am happy to think, as Lloyd George has suggested, that in Scotland we are taking a different view of the situation. Scotland is said to be a land of mist but I am glad to think that it is not a land of political mist. All the political mist that is available is at the present time lying over the southern counties of England where it is blinding men's eyes and choking the voice of wisdom...there is no dividing line which separates us. We can work together still as we have worked during these last four years. (28)

Lloyd George came to Glasgow to speak with Horne and Sir Andrew Duncan of the National Liberals. In expressing his hope that the Glasgow form of pacts would survive the election Lloyd George argued, 'Scotsmen do not change their minds very easily. When you make up your minds and get an idea into your heads you do not get

27 "To the Electors of Glasgow". Statement issued by SUA Western Divisional Council and Scottish National Liberal Council (Western Division), contained in SUA papers.

28 Scotsman, October 30, 1922.

rid of it quickly. We are changeable people in the south. You have got it into your heads that national unity is necessary for national safety. Stand by that till the country is safe and secure. You are quite right and I agree with you.'⁽²⁹⁾ Sir Andrew Duncan went further, and said he felt convinced that 'in this great city Mr Bonar Law and now Mr Lloyd George would have ascertained that the people of Glasgow thought there were no grounds for the change that was made'⁽³⁰⁾.

With Lloyd George promoting coalitionism and Sir Robert Horne and Conservatives encouraging it, even Bonar Law had to make concessions to the mood of Scotland. He had to argue in favour of his decision to break with the Coalition not on the grounds of a Conservative resentment of Lloyd George, nor of the desire to put forward independent Conservative policies, but on the grounds that two anti-socialist parties would be more effective than one. When he spoke in Glasgow during the general election campaign he was accompanied on his platform by both supporters and opponents of continued coalition. In explaining, somewhat defensively, that half the Unionist M.P.'s (and even more candidates) had stated they would not stand again except as Unionists and Conservatives and that he himself had considered resigning, he went on to suggest:

The argument most strongly put forward that in view of the pressure from Labour and the danger from Labour it was necessary to keep up for ever the name of a coalition when the reality had gone...is a profound mistake. If we had succeeded in setting up on the one hand one party representing everything opposed to Labour and the other Labour alone you could have done nothing which would have added more to the force of Labour and you must have made it certain that, as alternative government must come, the next government would have been a Labour Government.⁽³¹⁾

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Scotsman, October 27, 1922.

They were, he said, achieving 'no good by trying to get formulas which seem to bring views which are totally opposed together'. However with respect to Scotland, he went on to state:

I see no reason whatever why in individual areas the people concerned with the two parties who have worked together up till now should not continue to work together... I should be very glad personally if something of this kind could be done in Glasgow but obviously it is not for me to attempt to give orders.(32)

So strong was the desire for cooperation between Unionists and National Liberals in Scotland that Bonar Law had in fact to advise his friend Gideon Murray, one of only two leading Diehards among Scotland's Conservative Members, to stand down. The St. Rollox Conservative Association had already chosen a coalitionist having rejected their sitting MP, Gideon Murray, as a result of the views expressed by Murray in favour of independence. As Murray recounted later:

When the general election came, Bonar Law rang up and asked me if possible to find a seat in England because he was going to find it a very difficult task owing to his being the only Scottish member besides myself who has gone out against the coalition. He felt he would be able to get on more easily in Scotland if he had not me by his side who for nearly a year had been working independently of the other Scottish Unionist M.P.'s.(33)

There were few difficulties about adhering to the agreement between National Liberals and Conservatives. In twenty constituencies which had been won by the Conservatives in 1918 the same candidate stood with the support of National Liberals, and in five other Conservative seats where there was a change of candidate, the Conservative Party made the choice without any objections from the

32 Ibid.

33 G Murray, A Man's Life, (London, 1936) pp.266-7.

National Liberals. The Conservatives were just as obliging in Shettleston where the Conservative Diehard Captain Adair had won in 1918. When he stood down it was the National Liberal candidate who was given a free run. In Motherwell held by a Coalition Conservative in 1918 the Unionist Association supported a National Liberal in 1922. Where Liberal Coalition seats were handed on to National Liberals to fight as candidates of the right there were few difficulties. Thus in eleven seats contested by sitting National Liberals, Conservative support was almost automatic. In other thirteen where there were candidate changes, the Conservatives gave the new National Liberals their support⁽³⁴⁾. However in Berwick and Haddington, a Liberal Coalition seat in 1918, the Unionists objected to the choice by Haddington National Liberal Association Executive of John Hope as candidate,⁽³⁵⁾ and when the East Lothian and Berwick Unionist Association met, it resolved to have a candidate 'representative of Unionist views'. The position was more complicated by the fact that Balfour, who lived in the area, had already promised his support to Hope. Balfour wrote to Lloyd George saying that: 'I have had, I admit, not unreluctantly to withdraw from that position...neither Unionists nor Liberals would look at him'. Lloyd George's advice to Hope was to retire, but Hope insisted on pursuing his candidature⁽³⁶⁾. The situation was thus resolved by the National Liberals bringing forward a new candidate, Waring, who gained Conservative support. In this case Unionist pressure had forced a change of candidate⁽³⁷⁾. Although Hope received only four votes, East Lothian and Berwick Unionists were still in favour of the coalition.

34 Information from Scotsman and Glasgow Herald, October, November 1922.

35 Scotsman, October 26, 1922.

36 Balfour to Lloyd George, October 1922, contained in Gilmour Correspondence, GD/383/17.

37 Ibid, October 30, 1922.

The Unionists also supported the National Liberals' new choice in Roxburgh and Selkirk, which had been vacant at the time the election was declared, although the candidature of Henderson was not popular with the Unionists. They had originally agreed to support him only at the by-election which was expected and not at a general election. In the end they agreed to support him only by 38 to 33 after a motion to place a Unionist candidate in the field lost only by 36 votes to 35⁽³⁸⁾. In Rutherglen, the Coalition Liberal seat also fell vacant, because the sitting member, Rodger, resolved to retire because of the collapse of the coalition in order to give both National Liberals and Conservative associations the chance 'to shape their course' without embarrassment⁽³⁹⁾. The Unionist Executive initially agreed to bring forward its own candidate after a unanimous vote but, eventually, the candidature of the Liberal, Train, who claimed to be 'a Liberal with qualification', was accepted⁽⁴⁰⁾.

The seats which Coalition Liberals or Conservatives did not hold were potentially more of a problem. In fact, however, there was little problem in reaching agreements even when both parties had candidates. In South Ayrshire, a Coalition Conservative had lost in 1918, in a four party contest involving Liberal and Independent Liberal, as well as the successful Labour candidate, who had won with only 38% of the vote. The Unionists in 1921 had

38 Scotsman, October 31, 1922. Roxburgh was one area where 'Diehard' feeling' was strong. The Scotsman editor was to write to Sir John Gilmour in June 1923 that Roxburgh was 'almost the only county in Scotland from which I get Diehard letters and along the Borders there I know a pretty strong Conservative feeling in favour of throwing over Henderson at the next election'. Dalkeith wanted to stand as a Conservative.. Editor of Scotsman to Gilmour, June 7, 1923 Gilmour Correspondence GD.383/18.

39 Ibid, October 27, 1922.

40 Ibid

adopted a candidate, Wallace, while the Liberal Association, which was pro-Coalition, had adopted Sir William Reid. When the coalition ended the South Ayrshire Liberal Association and the Unionist Association both agreed to support Reid⁽⁴¹⁾ on the grounds that, 'If socialism were to be combated those of moderate views must be united'⁽⁴²⁾.

Kirkcaldy had been lost to Labour at the 1921 by-election in which a Coalition Liberal candidate had stood with Unionist support. Although the new candidate, Hutchison, favoured Free Trade and Lloyd George, he was adopted both by the Kirkcaldy and District Burghs Liberal and Radical Association, which was pro-Coalition, and by the Unionist Association, which argued that 'the only programme with which they did not agree was the programme published by the Labour Party'⁽⁴³⁾. In Dundee, the second seat had gone to the Labour candidate, Wilkie, in 1918. In 1922 the Unionists decided, although only narrowly, not to place a candidate in the field and to give support both to Churchill, the sitting member, and the new National Liberal candidate, Macdonald⁽⁴⁴⁾. In Bothwell a Coalition Liberal had stood at the by-election of 1919, but in 1922 a Conservative candidate went forward with National Liberal support - exactly the same formula as in 1918 at the previous general election⁽⁴⁵⁾.

In other cases, where the National Liberal-Unionist alliance failed to clear the way for one anti-socialist candidate, Unionists stood

41 Scotsman, October 23, 1922.

42 Ibid., October 28, 1922.

43 Scotsman, October 31, 1922.

44 Ibid., October 27, 28, 1922.

45 November 1, 1922. The candidate was jointly chosen by National Liberal and Unionist Associations, and despite a threat by the independent Liberal, to intervene, nothing came of it.

against Liberals. This was true of Aberdeenshire Central which had been a Coalition Liberal seat in 1918, had been lost to the independent Liberals in 1919, and in 1922 found the Liberals competing against the Conservatives. Equally in Greenock, the sitting member, Sir Godfrey Collins, who had asserted his independence from the Coalition, was to be opposed by a National Liberal who had been adopted, but when the election came he stood aside in favour of a Unionist. But generally the Unionist policy was to encourage National Liberals to fight seats where Labour or Liberal was well established as opponents.

There were in fact only two constituencies where conciliation between National Liberals and Conservatives proved to be impossible - and in both the problems that engulfed the two wings of the previous Coalition had been deepseated, and existed long before the election was declared. Chapter 3 traced the attempts by Sir John Gilmour to persuade Unionists in Cathcart to accept a Coalition Liberal choice as candidate during 1920 and 1921. In fact when the Cathcart Unionist President had recommended the Liberal nominee to the Unionist Association, after a joint meeting with the Liberals, his Association had declined to accept him. Unionist headquarters then proceeded to resist the Unionist choice as an official candidate, 'on the grounds that they considered themselves bound by the pact entered into by the whips of both parties'. A small group of Cathcart Unionists issued their own Manifesto saying that 'the present time is not opportune for splitting the vote of holders of moderate opinion'⁽⁴⁶⁾. In the end, Cathcart Unionists placed their own candidate in the field⁽⁴⁷⁾, but the Scottish Unionists preferred to offer support to

46 Glasgow Unionist Association, Annual Report, 1923.

47 Ibid. Cathcart Unionists continued their protest well into 1923, 'with a view to endeavouring to prevent in future headquarters recommending to the electors again a candidate other than the one selected by the divisional association in accordance with the rules of Glasgow Unionist Association'.

the National Liberal, Sir Andrew Duncan, who appeared on Unionist platforms during the campaign and had been ratified by the joint pact of the National Liberals and Unionists⁽⁴⁸⁾.

In Perth and East Perthshire the difficulties which led to Liberal, National Liberal and Conservative candidates in 1922 had been developing before the election when Conservatives had adopted their candidate and the National Liberals had favoured Gourlay as 'a restraining influence' against 'the Conservative Diehards and socialist extremists', and a supporter of Lloyd George who was 'a heaven-sent leader'⁽⁴⁹⁾. Even before the Carlton Club decision, Austen Chamberlain had rejected Gilmour's plea that either he or Lloyd George should intervene to prevent a fight between the two wings of the Coalition⁽⁵⁰⁾.

While negotiations on candidatures proceeded, the National Liberals claimed to 'be strong and to be able to bring forward candidates against the Unionists should the word come from party headquarters'. But on the ground the party's organisation was never as strong as it appeared to be. National Liberal organisations which had emerged in 1920, existed at least on paper in forty-two Scottish constituencies. But according to the Lloyd

48 Glasgow Unionist and National Liberal Associations, Joint Manifesto: To the Electors of Glasgow, November 1922, contained in papers of Glasgow Unionist Association.

49 Scotsman, November 3, 1922.

50 Austen Chamberlain to Gilmour, October 7, 1922. 'I do not think the PM or I should accept an invitation to tender advice to the Unionists. To arbitrate would be an invidious task and must bring us into conflict with one or other party... we should have all the odium of an arbitration without the certainty of a settlement. Gilmour Papers, GD.383/17.

George Liberal Magazine's reports of activities, work on the ground was thin in the industrial areas and in the far north of the country.⁽⁵¹⁾ In fact the main strength of the National Liberals came from the defection or non-affiliation of former Liberal constituency associations. Altogether nineteen Liberal Associations had been found to be pro-coalition most of whom did not affiliate to the Scottish Liberal Federation⁽⁵²⁾ and in 1922, fifteen Liberal Associations supported or encouraged National Liberal or Conservative candidates at the 1922 General Election⁽⁵³⁾. Thus, in most areas of Scotland, it was hardly the case that two Liberal organisations existed side by side: more often than not, the National Liberals existed in a constituency where the independent Liberals had collapsed.

With thirty-one National Liberals in the field, a far higher proportion of National Liberals stood in Scotland than in the rest of the country, but in every case but two where National Liberals stood, they had no Conservative opponent, and in almost every case

51 M Kinnear, op cit. Kinnear suggests that only seven were extremely active, in Argyll, West Renfrew, Motherwell, Rutherglen, Kelvingrove, Edinburgh East and Kirkcaldy. In six of these cases, the Liberal associations had defected en bloc.

52 The Liberal Associations that supported the Coalition were East Aberdeenshire, Inverness, Dundee, Bridgeton, Moray and Nairn, Montrose, Kinross, Haddington and Berwickshire, Partick, Argyll, Dumbarton Burghs, Dunfermline, Kirkcaldy, West Renfrew, Ross and Cromarty, Cathcart, Banff, South Ayrshire and Roxburgh and Selkirk. In East Aberdeenshire, Inverness, Dundee, Moray and Nairn, Montrose, Partick, Argyll and Rossshire, Western Isles, and Roxburgh new associations which supported the Scottish Liberal Federation and Asquith were brought into being. Information from Scottish Liberal Federation, Eastern Executive and Organising Committee Minutes, June 16, 1922; June 22, 1922; July 14, 1921; October 10, 1921; July 13, 1923, December 19, 1923; December 8, 1922.

53 The Liberal Associations that supported National Liberal or Unionist candidates at the election were: Dumbarton, Dunfermline, Bridgeton, Montrose, Stirling and Falkirk, Renfrew West, Hamilton, Lanark, Argyll, Berwick and Haddington, Inverness, Ross and Cromarty, Moray and Nairn, Dundee and South Ayr. Information compiled from newspapers and from Scottish Liberal Federation minutes, 1922-1923.

had the support of the Conservative Party. Indeed one of the reasons why there were so many National Liberals in the field was that the Coalition Liberals who had held their seats in 1918 were regarded as the best opponents of socialism, and where National Liberals did not hold their seats, and were in two party contests with the Liberals, the Unionists considered them to be the best challengers. Thus, one National Liberal was returned unopposed and twenty-three of the other thirty candidates appeared in straight fights either with Labour or Liberals.

Liberal claims and Liberal realities were two different worlds. At the Liberal Federation's Annual Meeting Sir Donald Maclean, the Chairman, spoke of 'the remarkable progress of Liberalism in Scotland'. The Eastern Finance Committee had recorded that 'for the first time, in the last six months, we had started to increase our subscriptions'⁽⁵⁴⁾. And when the Executive of the Scottish Liberal Federation met just after the election, they had, the Chairman claimed, 'a meeting with a record attendance....the meeting he understood was the largest in the history of the Federation'. But as we suggested in Chapter 3, the Liberal strength at the grass roots was limited. Of Scotland's seventy-one constituencies, at least 28 had Liberal Associations which were not fully constituted as members of the Scottish Liberal Association - and nineteen supported the National Liberals, although in some cases branches followed the official Liberal line. In July 1922, the Eastern Organising Committee - which at that time dealt with matters affecting all Scotland - heard that 'when consideration of two or three names was adjusted there would be forty Liberal candidates as against 39 Labour, 32 Unionist, 28 Coalition Liberals and nine

54 SLF, Eastern Finance Committee, June 28, 1922.

others'.⁽⁵⁵⁾ But when the election was declared there was a rush to endorse more candidates. The eventual list of forty-seven was 'considered very satisfactory'.⁽⁵⁶⁾

Liberals were given a clear run in a number of constituencies, and escaped a National Liberal or Conservative opponent. In Kilmarnock Shaw who had stood as a Coalition candidate in 1918 stood as 'a Liberal without prefix' in 1922, but even in these circumstances he received Unionist help. In Banff, the Unionist local association bowed to Head Office pressure to leave the sitting member a clear run and he was returned unopposed. Negotiations to secure neutrality at least in respect of Asquith's candidature in Paisley had been proceeding during 1922, as has been traced in Chapter 3. When the election was declared, Unionist headquarters in Scotland advised Paisley Unionist Association not to run a candidate and this advice was accepted by the local Unionists⁽⁵⁷⁾.

In Kinross and West Perthshire, Gardiner had received the National Liberal endorsement, then offered Bonar Law support⁽⁵⁸⁾ and was finally adopted by the Joint Committee of the two Liberal Associations as a Liberal and free trader, claiming as 'His aim and object to unite the two wings of Liberalism if possible and to work wholeheartedly with any government' ⁽⁵⁹⁾.

55 Ibid, July 25, 1922.

56 Ibid, October 20, 1922.

57 Scotsman, November 1, 1922.

58 Ibid, November 1, 1922.

59 Ibid., October 30, 1922.

Thus, in 1922, Liberals stood in forty-seven contests, two-thirds of the seats of Scotland. In three cases, they were accepted by National Liberals and Conservatives, and thus were either unopposed as in the case of Banff, or were Labour's sole opponent as in the cases of Kilmarnock and Paisley. In seventeen cases, Liberals took the field against Labour, with either a National Liberal or Conservative as the opponent. In the case of Perth there were National Liberal and Conservatives, and in Greenock, Conservative and Communist opponents. In Berwick and Haddington there were three proclaimed Liberals in the field and in Motherwell where an independent Conservative joined the contest, the official Liberals were only one of three opponents to Labour. But half the Liberal Party interventions occurred in seats where there was no Labour opponent and where it seemed safer for the anti-socialist opponents to fight out their differences.

The problem for the Federation, and for Asquith personally, was that not all the 'Liberal' candidates were anti-Lloyd George and anti-Coalition. Many stood as prefixless Liberals who refused to give support unequivocally to Asquith or his line. In Moray and Nairn for example, Guthrie, who spoke of himself as 'an independent Liberal' and survived a vote by both Conservative and Liberal Associations to dispossess him of support, said it was 'unfair to ask a candidate to tie himself at the present time to any leader',⁽⁶⁰⁾ In Kincardineshire and West Aberdeen, Murray considered himself 'a Liberal candidate with pure and defined principles', but not an Asquithian. In Galloway Dudgeon spoke of himself as a 'free Liberal' not bound to either the Liberals led by Mr Asquith or the Liberals led by Mr Lloyd George. Macdonald who was the Liberal candidate in Inverness came out in support of Lloyd George. Sinclair in Caithness and Sutherland was 'a Liberal first and last' who would work for unity. In Kilmarnock Shaw was 'a plain Liberal',⁽⁶¹⁾

60 Scotsman, October 30, 1922.

61 These comments come from the candidate's election manifestoes and reports in Scotsman and Glasgow Herald.

Thus in Scotland as a whole, Asquith's hold on his own party was much more tenuous than it appeared. There were eight seats where prefixless Liberals stood (sometimes with no National Liberal opposition, but at other times even with it),⁽⁶²⁾ and there could be said to be only a dozen seats where the Liberal associations and the candidates stood for the totally independent Liberalism which Asquith claimed to represent⁽⁶³⁾. In most other cases, Liberals were either dubious of Asquith's leadership or were dependent on National Liberal or Unionist support.

62 The seats were Caithness, Inverness, Western Isles, Moray and Nairn, West Aberdeenshire, Banff, Galloway and West Perth and Kinross.

63 These constituencies were South Aberdeen; Edinburgh South; Edinburgh West; Hillhead; Kelvingrove; Central Aberdeen; East Fife; Forfar; East Aberdeenshire; Orkney and Shetland; Paisley; and Kilmarnock, although in this last case Shaw stood as a 'liberal without prefix'.

II LABOUR PREPARATIONS

Despite the hopes and promises of the immediate post-war years, Labour was not well prepared for the 1922 General Election. Indeed the declining membership, activity, and finance engendered a defensive rather than aggressive mood within the movement, as the recession began to bite. As early as 1920, the party's Scottish Executive had doubted the wisdom of exhausting money and resources on too many parliamentary contests unless the party had locally made some headway in local authority elections and had sufficient resources to fight⁽¹⁾. In failing to build a central Scottish fund for fighting elections, the Scottish Executive of the party had recognised that financing elections was now a matter for the constituency organisations, with the support of the I.L.P. and trades unions. While the party's 1922 Report to the Scottish Conference spoke of the 'state of healthy activity in Scotland', it had to admit that 'economic conditions prevailing in industry are affecting the resources of our movement'⁽²⁾. Ben Shaw, the Secretary of the Scottish Council, estimated that 20,000 members had lapsed in Glasgow alone. Writing later in an article in Forward newspaper, Shaw accepted that 'the serious and protracted trade depression with the huge inroads made by unemployed members upon union funds will have an effect upon our fighting efficiency'⁽³⁾. And while he could claim that 'we have sixty-two divisional Labour Parties with definite organisations', he had to concede that 'some of them want stirring up a bit'⁽⁴⁾.

The general election omens that had emerged from the municipal elections of 1921 and the education authority contests of April 1922 were not encouraging. Labour had lost rather than gained seats in most of the country with the exception of Fife in the municipal

1 Labour Party Scottish Council Executive Report 1920.

2 Ibid., Executive Report, 1922

3 Forward, March 18, 1922

4 Ibid.

elections of 1921 and Dollan had had to conclude that 'the big lesson of the present election is that destitution hunger and unemployment are not aids to the Labour cause',⁽⁵⁾. The education authority elections of April 1922 were a further setback for Labour. Forward newspaper's 'call to arms' in February 1922 suggested that there should be five hundred Labour candidates, who would stand on a specific programme which demanded free books, free education, teaching on temperance, trade union conditions for teachers and the introduction of school baths. The election, the paper argued, presented 'a unique opportunity of rejecting the savage cuts into the rights of our children' imposed by the Government's economy programme, and the party should make every effort 'to make it perfectly clear that the issue is not the respective merits of protestantism and catholicism',⁽⁶⁾. However while far more electors voted in 1922 - 51% in Glasgow compared with 27% in 1919 - Labour's vote fell to what seemed its 'irreducible minimum', as voting polarised on religious lines. In Glasgow Labour representation on the educational authority was reduced from fifteen to five: 27,800 first preference votes went to Labour, spread among the twenty-eight Labour candidates, which was certainly an increase on the 10,270 for twenty-five candidates in 1919 on a much lower poll. But there had been a strong Protestant turnout which meant that 'the Catholics could not even return their own nominees much less pass on their later preferences to Labour as was the case in 1919',⁽⁷⁾.

5 Forward, November 26, 1921.

6 Forward, February 25, 1922. 85 members had been elected throughout Scotland in 1919.

7 Forward, April 15, 1922.

Around the rest of the country Labour did no better, although in Dundee one seat was gained. In Aberdeen Labour lost their only seat to a Communist candidate and in Fifeshire and Lanarkshire Labour suffered badly as the campaign was conducted on religious lines. Labour lost three of its nine seats in Lanarkshire and in Fife while two seats were gained, four of the sixteen Labour held seats were lost. There was said Forward a 'whoop of triumph with which the reactionaries met the great defeat of Labour'⁽⁸⁾.

While electoral difficulties beset Labour, the party was handicapped also by the left-wing activities outside the party, and in particular the emergence of the Communist Party. Forward was critical of the miners' reform movement, as a campaign which had been launched in the country by members of the communistic order, and the Labour Party itself was hit by an increasingly militant position taken by some of its affiliated bodies⁽⁹⁾. In June 1922, for example, Glasgow Trades and Labour Council rejected the rule that Annual Conference Delegates could not be members of an organisation which was pledged to secure the election of candidates other than those of the Labour Party. It forced the Scottish Executive of the Labour Party to intervene to explain that 'the general purpose of the new rule was not to prohibit candidates like those of the cooperative societies which were run in association with the Labour Parties', but to 'protect the political Labour Movement from its avowed opponents'. When a further reply from the Executive specifically excluded Communist Party members, the Trades and Labour Council refused to comply⁽¹⁰⁾. In other areas, splits were developing within the Labour Party. Motherwell Trades and Labour Council adopted the Communist Party member, Walton Newbold, as their candidate and in Aberdeen, the Trades Council were asked to

8 Forward, April 15, 1922.

9 Ibid., September 30, 1922.

10 P Liddell, The Glasgow Trades Council, Strathclyde University M.Litt., 1977, pp.33-35.

consider placing a Communist in North Aberdeen in preference to the eccentric sitting member, Frank Rose⁽¹¹⁾. The party had also to deal with problems in Berwick and Haddington constituency where Robert Foulis, who had stood in the 1918 election, and was readopted as the candidate, was also a member of the Communist Party. Foulis resigned, but no such resolution could be effected in Greenock where a Communist candidate stood. Thus, the Scottish Executive had to report that in two west of Scotland divisions the local Labour parties had run Communist Party members as candidates despite their repeated advice. The party concluded that 'however desirable the united front, it is impossible to obtain it by breaches of the constitution'⁽¹²⁾.

If there were anxieties about the infiltration of the far left, Scottish Labour were also worried about the possibility of Labour cooperation with Liberalism. The Invernessshire by-election brought this matter into the open, when Henderson was alleged to have telephoned Inverness Trades and Labour Council saying that 'in the absence of a Labour candidate, Labour's business is to vote against the Coalition Government candidate'⁽¹³⁾. At their meeting later in March, the Scottish Executive Committee instructed their secretary to protest to headquarters about this advice and a motion came from Glasgow ILP, insisting on Labour's independence and its 'uncompromising hostility to all political parties standing for capitalism'. The Glasgow Trades and Labour Council took a similar line. The Scottish Executive unanimously approved this position⁽¹⁴⁾.

11 Scotsman, November 3, 1922. The communist who had proposed to stand was also the editor of the newspaper of the miners' reform movement in Fife, and decided at the last minute that it was inappropriate to stand in Aberdeen.

12 Labour Party Scottish Executive Report, 1923, p.9.

13 Forward, March 11, 1922.

14 Forward, March 11, 18 April 1922.

But when the Glasgow Trades Council went further and instructed all Divisional Labour Parties to exact such a pledge from parliamentary candidates, to oppose any sort of consultation with or consideration of candidatures of other parties, the National Agent, Wake, deprecated this move, and the Scottish Executive ruled it 'unconstitutional' for Glasgow constituency parties to exact a pledge of national character from candidates⁽¹⁵⁾.

Matters had come to a head in March 1922 with the cooperation at Clayton and Bodmin by-elections. In the first the Liberal withdrew for Labour; in the second, Labour for Liberal. Even in Scotland Labour was to be embarrassed by allegations of cooperation with the Liberals. When in Ayr the Liberal candidate, Raffan, claimed support from the Labour M.P., Joseph Westwood - a letter of support that was subsequently withdrawn under pressure - the Executive had to rule that 'both our constitution and our principles require absolute abstention where it is not possible for us to secure a candidate of our own'⁽¹⁶⁾. The general effect of this was not so much to rule out any Liberal and Labour cooperation as to hold Labour back in its rural areas and in seats it had not fought before. Labour stood aside in Invernessshire in the 1922 by election and it decided not to field a candidate in a subsequent vacancy in Moray and Nairn. The way was paved towards the situation of the 1922 election when Labour fielded only 43 candidates and stood aside in 28 seats.

Writing as has been stated early in 1922 the Scottish organiser Ben Shaw admitted that 'the serious and protracted trade depression with the huge inroads made by unemployed members upon union funds will have an effect upon our fighting efficiency'. And while he could claim 'we have 62 Divisional Labour Parties with definite organisations', he had to admit 'some of them want stirring up a bit'⁽¹⁷⁾. In fact most

15 Labour Party Scottish Executive Report, 1923, p.9

16 Ibid., p.8.

17 Forward, January 14, 1922.

were nothing more than 'shell' organisations with the practical work, if any, done by the Independent Labour Party or the sponsoring trade unions. It meant that the Labour Party was itself not equipped to persuade candidatures to fight seats where the I.L.P. or a union was unable to fight.

Chapter Two has shown how both the Independent Labour Party and the miners' union were the principal agents of Labour activity in securing parliamentary candidatures in the period from 1918 to 1921 and that both of them were facing severe financial difficulties from 1920, and in particular from 1921, onwards. The ILP were so worried in January 1922 that their Scottish Council had to form a special committee to re-examine electoral preparations, and in the event a special campaign of recruitment and organisation was decided upon⁽¹⁸⁾. While grants to candidates had to be reduced from an expected £100 for each seat to £50 for each seat, and the party had to withdraw from pursuing candidates in at least two constituencies, it was able even under pressure to field 21 candidates which were sponsored by the local ILP organisations⁽¹⁹⁾.

The same problems engulfed the miners' union, where an additional complication - Communist activity within the union-affected its capacity to promote Labour representation. Even as membership fell, the miners had attempted to retain their four political organisers for the ten constituencies on which they had set their sights and which had been recognised as miners' seats by Labour's National Executive as early as 1919. But the financial position of the union had become so parlous by October 1922 that the Scottish Executive asked their political committee 'to consider the advisability of withdrawing the candidates from two divisions owing to the financial position'⁽²⁰⁾. After discussion, the

18 Forward, January 14, 1922.

19 I.L.P. National Administrative Council, May 18, 1922.

20 Scottish Union of Mineworkers Executive, October 2, 1922.

political committee recommended to the Executive that 'the constituencies should be fought as was decided some time ago',⁽²¹⁾ but while the Executive accepted this decision, a committee was constituted to keep an eye on the expenditure of each agent and candidate and to interview them at intervals through the campaign⁽²²⁾.

During 1922, however, the Scottish ILP made special efforts to recover the ground it felt had been lost as a result of the recession. In August 1922, a special revival campaign was launched in Glasgow. What was called 'The Great Push' was based on Forward's argument that 'political action will hold the field as the chief weapon for the workers for the next two years'. With one hundred and forty meetings in 'The Great Push', the party considered that new ground had been broken in many places especially amongst audiences of women⁽²³⁾. In September, the ILP launched a Scottish campaign, 'War on Capitalism', which emphasised the party's new programme for workers' control in industry⁽²⁴⁾. But while the party could claim 143 branches in Scotland it had had to admit that 'some had lapsed',⁽²⁵⁾ and it was recognised that their campaign could not prosper because the Scottish branches had been suffering severely from trade depression⁽²⁶⁾.

21 Ibid., Political Committee, October 14, 1922.

22 Ibid., Political Committee, October 23, 1922.

23 Forward, August 19, 1922

24 Forward, September 2, 1922. The ILP was more confident after the campaign arguing for the time being that 'things are on the upturn...apathy and pessimism are vanishing and confidence and optimism are growing. Despair has given way to hope. Reaction is on the retreat'.

25 Ibid., April 1, 1922.

26 Ibid., September 23, 1922.

By the time of the 1922 election the situation was serious. As Pat Dollan recalled in his unpublished autobiography, 'we had little money in the bank and only a skeleton organisation in each division...we borrowed most of the money for deposits and raised the election expenses by collections at meetings',⁽²⁷⁾. In the end, however, the ILP sponsored twenty-one of the forty-three official Labour candidates who stood in Scotland.

Labour's intervention in the 1923 election was less therefore a full Labour party fight than a joint effort by the miners and the Independent Labour Party. Not only were forty-one of the forty-three candidates members of the ILP, but the ILP and the miners' union between them were financially responsible for thirty-one of the forty-three candidates. This point was not lost in the inquest on the election results. As Gallie of the Railway Clerks Association told the Scottish Labour Conference of 1923:

It was no credit of theirs that so many seats were won in Scotland. The victories were due mainly to the ILP which had undertaken the spade work in the divisions and also provided the funds for most of the elections. Indeed had it not been for the ILP many of the seats would not have been contested. It was time the NEC was made to realise their responsibility towards Scotland.⁽²⁸⁾

The main conclusion was that trade unions other than the miners were not pulling their weight. Scottish Secretary, Ben Shaw, was to tell the STUC Conference after the election:

27 P Dollan, Unpublished Autobiography, p. 49.

28 Labour Party, Scottish Conference Report, 1923, p.40.

The industrial and political activities of the movement cannot be separated...Politics were bound to rest on industrial organisation. 95% of the Labour Party were trade unionists. There were 62 Divisional Labour Parties in Scotland many not in an efficient state because trade union associations were not affiliated.(29)

The 1924 Scottish Labour conference was told:

Many of the larger unions did not pay their proposed quota towards party work in Scotland. Their development was restricted for lack of finance and reform was imperative if they were to win Scotland for a Labour Government...They could not do so on their present finances.(30)

Glasgow, where the ILP were to sponsor almost every Parliamentary contest was symptomatic of the problem. When the Executive of the Glasgow Trades and Labour Council met local Labour constituency parties just before the 1922 elections, the Council could only guarantee to give £2.10p per annum to local Labour Parties - far below the guaranteed £50 the ILP was to give to its sponsored candidates, although even £50 was insufficient⁽³¹⁾.

Labour was unable to field candidates in Aberdeenshire Central (fought in 1919) Ross and Cromarty, the Western Isles (fought in 1918), South Aberdeen, the second Dundee seat, North Edinburgh (fought in 1920), Hillhead and Kelvingrove (fought in 1918), Roxburgh and the Scottish Universities seat (fought in 1918), and Communists stood in Motherwell and Greenock. Thus there were 12 seats previously contested in which Labour had intended to fight

29 STUC Report, 1923, p.62.

30 Labour Party Scottish Conference Report, p.40.

31 Glasgow Trades and Labour Council, Minutes, September 19, 1922.

but did not. In Greenock, Sir Sankaran Nair had been the intended candidate but he had to pull out. In Dundee R Wallhead had been selected but did not stand in Dundee but in Merthyr. In Roxburgh the Railway Clerk's Association had originally intended to run a candidate but the Executive of the Union did not sanction the expenditure⁽³²⁾.

In Dumfriesshire although a meeting was held with J H Thomas to see if he might become candidate, it was decided in the end not to contest the seat mainly because Labour intervention at Parish and Town Council elections had met with little success. There was also talk of a first Labour candidature in East Aberdeenshire, but according to the Scotsman 'The Labour Party decided that discretion is the better part'⁽³³⁾. In Forfarshire John Hendry considered standing for Labour but withdrew⁽³⁴⁾. But Labour did fight in Pollok, North Midlothian, Kilmarnock and Perth where there had been no previous candidate.

A sign of Labour's financial difficulties can be gleaned from what Labour actually spent on electioneering in 1922. Labour's average expenditure for its forty-three candidates was only £447 where the British average for all parties was £707. But that average concealed important differences between, for example, the finance the Miner's Federation put up for their candidates and what the ILP and other local Labour Parties could afford for candidates who were not union-sponsored. In the mining seats, where Labour was successful, only West Fife where Labour was unopposed and Coatbridge with a small expenditure of £250 were below the average. In Ayrshire North, James Brown was to spend nearly £1000 - £921 - and in Lanarkshire and the Lothians, apart from Coatbridge, expenditures ranged from £600 - £800, more than half as much again as the average⁽³⁵⁾.

32 Scotsman, November 1, 1922.

33 Ibid., November 3, 1922.

34 Ibid., November 5, 1922.

35 Figures compiled from Labour Party Scottish Council Executive Report 1923, pp.4-6.

Labour's 1922 programme was a bold socialist one, making the capital levy and nationalisation central to its campaign. There had in fact been some disagreement over strategy for the election. At a joint committee of Scottish Executive and Labour members of 7 October 1922, Scottish MPs had pressed for a more moderate approach. Rose for example wanted 'a lively electoral campaign without formulating a programme'. Graham wanted to emphasise 'a want of definiteness about Scottish policy' on the part of other parties. 'We must have a programme specifically applicable to Scottish affairs', he said, 'emphasising the necessity of Scottish Home Rule for the decentralisation of many questions including pensions, fishing, housing, agriculture etc.'. Kennedy was against Home Rule and separate estimates. A sub-committee was suggested to draft a programme, but in the end the Executive was appointed to carry out this task and send the programme to MPs. Kennedy emphasised that it should 'include only items that made a wide electoral appeal...all our spokesman at the general election should avoid home rule, prohibition and such matters and concentrate upon questions like housing, feeding of children etc., which would avoid fractious controversy and secure a wide sympathy beyond the ordinary members of our own party' (36).

There was little evidence that Kennedy's advice was heeded. The Scottish Programme that was issued in 1922 advocated land nationalisation and the nationalisation of mines, the banks and other means of exchange, water, electricity, gas, railways, tramways, canals, shipping and aircraft. There would be a capital levy on 'private fortunes over £5000'. The manifesto stated:

Unemployment is a national problem and ought not to be made a local burden. It is the duty of the state to provide work or adequate maintenance for every willing worker.

36 Labour Party, Scottish Executive, Minutes of Meeting of Executive with Scottish MPs, October 7, 1922.

There were to be pensions of £1 weekly for all over sixty and the people were to be housed in 'healthy-well placed dwellings owned by local government authorities at rents which the working people are able to pay'. National taxation would be 'based upon capital and income of private fortunes over £5000 graded in proportion to the means of the holders and fixed at such rates as will meet all necessary government charges including service of the war debt (which should be reduced by the capital levy)',⁽³⁷⁾.

Labour did not apologise for arguing for a capital levy and nationalisation and afterwards candidates were to suggest these issues had turned out to be popular. Stephen said that in Camlachie the capital levy was 'one of the most popular planks and won very many votes on that issue alone'. Captain Hay said in Cathcart 'the capital levy seemed to catch on. The more people talked about it the more they seemed to like it'. Welsh in Coatbridge said 'the capital levy was the most popular thing I ever remember as an election issue'.⁽³⁸⁾

37 Labour Party Scottish Programme, 1922, Labour Party Scottish Executive Papers.

38 Forward, October-December 1922. Reports of Constituency Campaigns.

III THE CAMPAIGN AND ITS OUTCOME

In the sixty-nine constituencies outside the two member seat of Dundee (where there were six candidates) there were forty-four contests in which only two of the four major parties appeared. Three candidates in addition were unopposed. Thus a three or four party system was a reality for only one third of Scottish constituencies. The Labour challenge was the most important factor in restricting the number of candidates. Labour stood officially in only forty-three constituencies (excluding Dundee, where only one candidate was placed in the field and support was given in the other seat to Scrymgeour). In West Fife, Adamsom was unopposed. And in half the other contests, Labour faced a straight fight, in two cases with a Liberal opponent, in twelve cases with a National Liberal, and seven cases with a Conservative. The party fought only twenty three or four-cornered contests. In fifteen of them it fought Liberal and Conservatives only; in two it fought Liberal and National Liberal; in one, National Liberal and Conservative; and in two it was faced with four-cornered contests involving either a National Liberal or Independent Liberal in the field. The position is set out fully in Tables 4.1 and 4.2.

Generally, Liberals fought Conservative or National Liberals where it was safe to do so. More than half the Liberal interventions - twenty-six out of forty-seven - occurred in the safety of contests where there was no Labour opponent, or as in the case of Paisley and Kilmarnock where the Liberals were Labour's sole opponent. Equally, eighteen of the Conservatives in thirty-six candidatures were in seats where there was no Labour opponent or the Conservatives were the only opponent of Labour. In only two cases did the National Liberals stand in three or four-cornered contests, despite placing thirty-one candidates in the field. In twelve of their interventions they were Labour's sole opposition.

TABLE 4.1

Official Labour Candidatures in 1922 (1)

Unopposed		1	
Straight Fights:			
with Liberal	2		
with National Liberal	12*		
with Conservative	<u>7</u>		
Total		21	
Three Cornered:			
Lab./Nat.Lib./Lib.	2**		
Lab./Con./Lib.	15		
Lab./Con./Nat.Lib.	<u>1</u>	18	
Four Cornered:		2	
Dundee		1	(1)
		<u>43</u>	

* In Shettleston there was in addition an independent Communist

** In Gorbals there was in addition an independent Communist

- (1) Labour did not stand in Motherwell and Greenock where Communists took the field. In Dundee, there was only one Labour candidate for the two member seat. In addition, Labour support went to the Scottish Prohibitionist Scrymgeour.

Source: F W S Craig, British Election Statistics, 1918-1968 (Glasgow, 1960).

TABLE 4.2

General Election Contests in 1922

Unopposed			3
Two Cornered Contests:			
Labour v Liberal or Conservative or National Liberal	21*		
Liberal v Conservative	11		
Liberal v National Liberal	<u>12</u>	44	
Three Cornered Contests:			
Liberal v National Liberal v Labour	2*		
Liberal v Conservative v Labour	15		
Liberal v National Liberal v Conservative	1		
Liberal v Conservative v Communist Party	<u>1</u>	19	
Four Cornered Contests			3
Dundee			2

* For the purposes of this table two interventions by independent Communists are not included.

Source: F W Craig, British Parliamentary Election Results, 1918-1949 (Glasgow, 1969).

Socialism was clearly the dividing line in the election, despite the proliferation of parties and candidates. Forward proudly stated that 'for the first time in our electoral history Labour has set the issue of the election'. For the first time it was 'a real issue'⁽¹⁾. For the Scotsman, 'a vote for a Labour candidate is a vote for a capital levy. It is a vote for the confiscation of private wealth and the destruction of thrift, for the undermining of British credit, for the ruin of British industry...this foolish and dangerous proposal stands in the forefront of the Labour programme'⁽²⁾.

The threat of socialism was the admitted reason behind the electoral pacts. As Sir Robert Horne said:

For the last three years he had feared that if a division occurred between the Unionists and the National Liberals there were many constituencies in the country, and particularly in Scotland, where the socialist party might slip in between the ranks of those who stood opposed.⁽³⁾

In his election address in Hillhead he stated that he was:

glad to think that in Scotland the Unionist Party takes the view I hold, for were it otherwise a division between those two sections of moderate opinion would at the present time almost certainly result here in the triumph of the subversive socialist policy which advocates amongst other things the distinctive principles of nationalisation and the capital levy.⁽⁴⁾

Later Horne was to defend his electoral pacts on the grounds that 'the moderate parties in the country could not afford to separate and divide in the circumstances of the present time'. In these

1 Forward, November 18, 1922.

2 Scotsman, November 1.

3 Ibid.

4 Election Address, 1922.

circumstances it was the Liberals who found themselves in difficulties, since as Horne pointed out, they found it difficult to formulate a policy differing essentially from that of the Unionist Party. The mismatch of Liberal programmes belied the superficial unity around Asquith's independent Liberalism. Chapple, for example, supported miners and rail nationalisation⁽⁵⁾ Smith, would recognise Russia and provide more security against unemployment while reducing expenditure⁽⁶⁾. Donaldson wanted a minimum wage settlement and a forty hour week⁽⁷⁾. Collins in Greenock argued for national funds for unemployment benefit, work for the unemployed, free trade, and social progress⁽⁸⁾. Hogge in Edinburgh was not totally opposed to the capital levy but 'would make most people pay income tax on a very graduated scale'⁽⁹⁾. What united Liberals more than anything else was support for national economy. Maclean made it his theme⁽¹⁰⁾. Benn argued for peace, retrenchment and reform, against state management, and for curtailing unproductive expenditure⁽¹¹⁾. Asquith argued against coalition, for 'stern economy', which the 'only one live and independent party' could bring, and suggested that while the country had had enough of coalition in any shape or form, there were 'only two fixed bands in the whole political landscape - the Liberal Party and the Labour Party'⁽¹²⁾.

5 Election Address, 1922, Scotsman, November 1, 1922.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Election Address, 1922.

9 Scotman, November 1.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

So while Labour argued that capital levy and nationalisation would solve unemployment and bad housing, the anti-socialist forces argued against extremism. Other issues did come to the forefront. The ramifications of the Clydebanks test case on evictions was fully exploited by Labour⁽¹³⁾. As Wheatley later said 'the rents' question was not allowed to be overlooked'. Maclean's slogan was 'ditch the factors',⁽¹⁴⁾ and the Scotsman reported that an eve of poll leaflet had promised that a Labour vote would ensure people would get their rent back. Later it was to suggest there 'never was as strong a card as the House of Lords judgement',⁽¹⁵⁾.

The campaign was a bitter one. If as Forward claimed 'the political leaders have all had to dance to Labour's piping',⁽¹⁶⁾ the Scottish right made a contest of it. One Tory leaflet spoke of Labour's plans for 'the nationalisation of women',⁽¹⁷⁾. In West Stirling, Hope claimed in a leaflet 'Socialism and Religion' that 'socialist Sunday schools taught class hatred...taught to children despite all priests and ministers', and that the Labour Party was 'hostile to the religion of Christ',⁽¹⁸⁾. In Central Glasgow, there was an attack on 'Red sympathisers' with posters including that of a Bearded Russian, saying, 'He wants you to vote socialist: 'Don't'; another said, 'Bolshevism is only socialism with the courage of its convictions',⁽¹⁹⁾.

13 Ibid., November 25, 1922.

14 Scotsman, November 16, 1922.

15 Ibid. November 17, 1922.

16 Forward, November 18, 1922.

17 Forward, 25 November, 1922.

18 Ibid.

19 Scotsman, November 16, 1922.

The contest of 1922 was 'a fight against socialism'. This was emphasised by the fact that there were 21 straight fights against Labour in the 43 constituencies the party had been able to fight. The results confirmed the fears of the Conservatives, National Liberals and Liberals. Labour won 29 seats, nine of these on a minority vote, and it received one third (32.2%) of the electoral vote. As the results became clear, Conservatives were unanimous in their condemnation of the verdict of the electors. The Conservative candidate in West Edinburgh suggested 'one had to go back to Flodden before we would find a similar national disaster', and his colleague in South Edinburgh argued that, 'Scotland possessed three great qualities - a love of liberty, of industry, and of religion. These were being assailed by the socialist party'. But another message was taken from the fact Labour had won nine seats on a minority vote. 'The spirit of coalition is still alive' proclaimed the Scotsman, arguing there was a need for more, not less, cooperation between the anti-socialist parties 'if the socialist menace is to be fought and conquered'⁽²²⁾.

20 Scotsman, November 17, 1922.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

That indeed was the mood of Liberals and Conservatives as the election campaign ended, and after the results were declared. From the Unionist side, Clark Hutchison, Thomson, Ford, Hutchinson, Mitchell Thomson and Weston argued for continued cooperation between Liberals and Conservatives after the elections; Jameson, in West Edinburgh, arguing he 'hoped it was not to be a long separation from his Liberal friends upon the other side of the coalition',⁽²³⁾ In North Edinburgh, Ford argued for a new understanding with the National Liberals in the new Parliament⁽²⁴⁾. Indeed the position of Gilmour and Walter Elliot in a new Conservative administration was in doubt until after the new Parliament met. At a strategy meeting of Chamberlain supporters on December 23, it was agreed however that Eliot accept an invitation to serve as Scottish Parliamentary Under-Secretary of Health, and Gilmour was also later to join the Conservative Government. But in 1923, and 1924, both were to strive for the maximum cooperation with the Liberals wherever possible.

On the face of it the Liberals did better than expected. Independent Liberals recorded fifteen seats in Scotland, a high number since only 62 seats were won in England. The party had put up 333 candidates, forty eight of them in Scotland, where from only eight seats in 1918 its representation virtually had doubled, and if the National Liberal victories were included, the party had won twenty seven Scottish seats in all - a strong grounding for a reunion if that were to happen. But the results belied the Liberal weakness. All the seats won by Liberals or National Liberals were in two party contests with the three exceptions of Greenock, Leith, and Berwick and Haddington and in this last instance there had been four candidates, though none had been Conservative. But even in a straight fight with Labour,

23 Scotsman, November 1, 1922.

24 Ibid.

only four - Paisley, Kilmarnock, Montrose and Kirkcaldy - were won, the first by Asquith himself, the second by a prefixless Liberal, and the last by a Lloyd Georgian Liberal. In one constituency a Liberal had been unopposed, and in twelve National Liberal had fought Liberal. Six only had been won in straight fights with a conservative.

Liberalism was left with little in industrial or mining Scotland. Greenock, Paisley, Kilmarnock and Leith, where the party had been victorious, all had their own peculiar histories. In Greenock there had been no Labour candidate but a Communist; in Paisley the Conservative had stood aside to give Asquith a free run and Conservatives had also stood down in Kilmarnock. Although in Leith, there had been a Conservative the party had not fought this seat in 1918 - intentionally. It could be said that in those seats the Conservatives had allowed the Liberals to win. Liberalism no longer held any sway in Aberdeen or in Dundee, with the defeat of Churchill, and it was reduced to two seats in Edinburgh, where the East and West seats had been won in straight fights with National Liberal and Conservative respectively. There had been no Labour presence and in 1924 both were lost when Labour intervened as a third force.

In the country areas Liberalism had firmer roots. The Liberals were to hold Western Isles, Ross and Cromarty, Inverness, Caithness and Sutherland and Orkney and Shetland throughout the 1920's although with the exception of Orkney and Shetland in 1923 and 1929, without opposition from the Conservatives. However, the North-East was not so promising. In East and West Aberdeenshire, Independent Liberals won in 1922, although it was a prefixless Liberal who won in West Aberdeenshire. Liberalism also triumphed in Banff and Moray and Nairn. However these were seats which were to fall to Conservatives with the exception of West Aberdeenshire in 1924, as Labour made its first general election interventions.

The Conservative base, though superficially weaker, was in fact much stronger than it appeared. The party had won only 13 seats, despite contesting thirty six, half the Scottish seats. But they had won urban seats they would hold on to throughout the twenties and had secured their position as the party of the urban middle class. They were to hold Glasgow's Central, Hillhead, Pollok and Kelvingrove throughout, beating off, first, Liberal and, then, Labour opposition. Edinburgh North and South were natural Conservative seats from the 1920 by-election onwards. In Aberdeen the South seat was held throughout the twenties, and so too was the Ayr constituency. Their other areas of strength were in the middle class suburban rather than purely rural countryside areas - Peebles, North Lanark, Dumbartonsire, Ayrshire, Bute and North Ayr, and Perth.

In 1922 the scale of Labour's advance in Britain as a whole has been questioned by Cook:

Since Labour did not contest 135 seats in 1918 or 1922 and with withdrawals in 64 and declining support in a further 85, there were no less than 284 seats in which even where a Labour candidate was seen, support was minimal.(26)

But in industrial Scotland, the election results testified to a dramatic swing from right to left.

26 C Cook and J Taylor, The Labour Party, (London, 1979), p.86. Cook's account is partially correct. In Scotland, Labour stood aside in 12 they fought in 1918; in others their vote fell from their 1918 performance.

Labour were to be surprised by their successes in 1922. Predictions for electoral gains in the second post-war election had varied with circumstances. Immediately following the 1918 election, Central Office had made a calculation of probable and possible Labour gains. In addition to the seats already held, they had estimated Scotland would produce seven 'probable' gains out of 61 'probables' in Britain as a whole. As regards 'possible' Scotland was reckoned to have 18 constituencies out of 123 'possibles' in Britain. Thus, in 1919 Labour estimates were between 13 and 31 seats in Scotland⁽²⁷⁾. The local elections' results of 1919 and 1920 had given Labour in Scotland increased confidence. But by the beginning of 1922, economic depression had moderated Labour's ambitions. In January 1922 the Scottish Secretary Ben Shaw, made an assessment of Labour's possible successes. At that time he estimated 55 candidates - rather than the 43 who stood - would be in the field, but he expected only twenty-three victories although he did not see: 'why we can't secure 25 seats in Scotland. But in the event of a coalition split we would secure an advantage in many other constituencies and anything might happen'. He expected to win Bridgeton, Gorbals, Govan, Maryhill (especially if there was a coalition split), Shettleston, Springburn, and St Rollox in Glasgow. In Lanarkshire, Hamilton, Bothwell, Coatbridge, and Rutherglen were marked down as gains. Outside the Western Central belt, he expected to hold Edinburgh Central, Fife West, Ayrshire South, and their Aberdeen seat. Dumbarton would be Labour with 'a sporting chance in Linlithgow'. But he admitted that 'the serious and protracted trade depression with the huge inroads made by unemployed members upon union funds will have an effect upon our fighting efficiency'. Labour won nearly one in every three of the votes cast - receiving more than half a million votes in all. Yet Labour fielded official candidates in only 43 of the seventy one constituencies, leaving the right wing forces mostly unchallenged in most of the other 28.

27 Report of National Executive Committee on Electoral Organisation, NEC Files, March 1919.

While Welsh Labour received over 40% of the votes, their average vote per seat was 13,000. In Scotland the Labour average was just under 12,000 while in England it was less than 10,000. Labour in Scotland had not only won twenty-nine of the forty-three seats in which it had stood; twenty of these, it would hold throughout the twenties, without interruption. As Table 4.3 suggests the 1922 election emphasised that the electoral politics of industrial Scotland was dominated by the extent of Labour's advance⁽²⁸⁾.

28 Forward, January 14, 1922.

TABLE 4.3

1922 Election Results - Share of Vote

By Parties

	<u>SCOTLAND</u>	<u>GREAT BRITAIN</u>
Conservative	25.1	38.5
Liberal	21.5	18.9
Labour	32.2	29.7
National Liberal	17.7	9.4

Source: F W Craig, as cited above.

TABLE 4.4

1922 Election : Average Votes per candidate

By Parties

Conservative	10,536
Liberal	6,846
Labour	11,650
National Liberal	8,743

Source: F W Craig, as cited above.

THE 1923 ELECTION

I LABOUR ORGANISATION AND POLICY

1922 had been a turning point for Labour. From being a fringe party, it was now Scotland's biggest single grouping at Westminster. As the Labour Party Scottish Executive reported to the 1923 Conference:

Labour is now THE PREDOMINANT PARLIAMENTARY PARTY IN SCOTLAND, having reached double the membership of the Conservative Party and exceeded by five the Conservatives and National Liberals added together. Continued organising work will doubtless give Scotland a clear majority at the next election over all the other parties put together.(1)

Moreover, after the election, Labour's organisation improved, membership went up, and seats which had not been contested in 1922 were assessed for the first time. By the beginning of 1924, there were to be 66 divisional Labour Parties for Scotland's seventy parliamentary constituencies (Dundee had a two member seat), and 'one hundred and fifty local parties of one type or another'. But while progress was made, much of it was more apparent than real. As the Executive had to concede, 'some of these local Labour Parties were not very active at election times' (2).

The dynamic for Labour remained that of the Independent Labour Party. In January it claimed 176 branches in Scotland - an increase of 27 since the calling of the election (3). While the

1 Labour Party Scottish Council, Executive Report, 1923, p.2

2 Ibid.

3 Forward, January 27, 1923.

Scottish organiser had to admit 'membership has fluctuated', he could claim an additional thirty-five branches by February⁽⁴⁾, and individual branches were increasing their membership, one, Exchange in Glasgow, claiming a doubling (from 50 to 114) in the wake of the elections⁽⁵⁾.

There were to be troughs as well as heights for the ILP in 1923. The May Day celebrations were 'disappointing in many places. Processions are no longer attractive and meetings such as we had in Glasgow have lost their appeal'⁽⁶⁾. But campaigns were organised in what were to be called 'the backward areas', and with Maxton and other Clydeside MPs campaigning in the Highlands, new branches were formed such as in Stornoway with 70 members⁽⁷⁾, a decision was made by Inverness-shire Trades and Labour Council to contest the next elections⁽⁸⁾, and Forward argued that 'most if not all of the Highland constituencies can be won'⁽⁹⁾. In Lanarkshire also the autumn propaganda campaign went successfully, with 'the general open-air propaganda...the most successful ever experienced in the history of the Party'⁽¹⁰⁾. By October affiliation fees in Scotland had doubled in six months⁽¹¹⁾, and the ILP had 172 branches⁽¹²⁾.

4 Ibid., February 27, 1923.

5 Ibid., February 3, 1923.

6 Ibid., May 1, 1923

7 Ibid., September 5, 1923

8 Ibid., September 1, 1923

9 Ibid., September 29, 1923

10 Ibid., September 5, 1923

11 Ibid., October 13, 1923

12 Ibid.

In Glasgow the yearly report, 1923-24, was to record the same improvement, leading Dollan to say the Glasgow ILP was now 'the people's party'. Membership had increased by 50%, a calculation based on the number of fully paid up members for the whole of twelve months and once unemployed members were included, it was claimed membership had more than trebled during the year⁽¹³⁾. Throughout Scotland, by the end of the year the ILP had increased to 200 branches in all.

The boost of the election was most evident in the West of Scotland. As Dollan recalls, 'when the election results were over we ran Sunday evening meetings for a season in the cinema and theatres. These were attended by record audiences who contributed liberally to the funds so that we ended the campaign with a large surplus which was banked and came in handy for the general election which followed ten months later'⁽¹⁴⁾. The ILP's Annual Report in Glasgow for 1922-23 was to record, 'an influx of members after the general election', which meant they 'maintained their membership strength' which had been diluted previously by the effects of recession⁽¹⁵⁾.

The mood in Scotland was undoubtedly more militant although it was scarcely one of confidence. The 1923 STUC Congress were told by their Chairman that although it was possible to win temporary gains through trade unionism, they needed to depend for solutions to problems such as unemployment and poor housing on political action⁽¹⁶⁾. When the Unemployed Workers' movement demanded

13 Glasgow, ILP Federation, Annual Report, 1923-24.

14 P J Dollan, Unpublished Autobiography, p.50.

15 Glasgow Independent Labour Party Federation, Annual Report, 1922-23.

16 Scottish Trade Union Congress, Report, 1923, p.87.

affiliation, their spokesman, Harry McShane, argued that parliamentary action alone was insufficient and asked for support from the Congress for a general strike to gain full maintenance for the unemployed. The proposal was remitted to the General Council by 83 votes to 36. But the Congress also passed a motion giving the General Council powers to negotiate with trade unions considering a general strike in any industry, and to consider with other unions the possibilities for calling a national general strike⁽¹⁷⁾.

The STUC also passed motions for democratic control in industry, for a forty-eight hour week, a Royal Commission into banking, for legislation to feed all children in need, for home rule for Scotland, for an enquiry into the Scottish cost of living, for control of railways, an extension of pensions, and against fascist movements in the country. They protested against the government's 1923 budget, demanded action on unemployment, control of building materials and restoration of the housing subsidy, and for a widening of unemployment insurance to include all workers. They also protested against the legislation to end rent restriction and against the plural vote⁽¹⁸⁾.

If anything the Scottish Labour Party Conference was more radical. Many of the proposals were commonplace - the nationalisation of the railways, better war pensions, an immediate restoration of housing subsidies, unemployment to become a national charge and benefits to be adequate, and a demand for a new poor law enquiry in Scotland. But on some issues the party went much further.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid., p.11.

It was Patrick Dollan on behalf of the Scottish ILP who argued at the Labour Party's Scottish Conference for a general rents strike, if parliamentary opposition to the government failed. He believed the Government were in danger of provoking 'a movement much more intense than that which gave rise to the Rent Strike of 1915'. Opponents suggested that such a rent strike would be difficult to organise and could be a fiasco. But the amendment which opposed direct action on the rents issue gained only four votes - against ninety four with perhaps thirty abstaining⁽¹⁹⁾.

On unemployment policy, the Scottish Conference seemed even more prepared to tolerate militancy. After the Conference agreed to hear an unemployed workers' movement spokesman who argued that Labour MPs 'should fight the battle over jobs in the country, rather than in Parliament', conference agreed that the National Unemployment Committee should be allowed to affiliate to Divisional Labour Parties and Trades and Labour Councils. But the vote, 30 to 16, implied most delegates abstained⁽²⁰⁾.

Clearly the Conference had moved far towards supporting Communist affiliation to the Labour Party and the decision showed the conference to be to the left of the Labour Party nationally on the issue. In practice the Scottish Executive of the party frustrated the execution of the decision, rejecting a demand in January 1924 that there be affiliation of the movement⁽²¹⁾. But as the Scottish Party divided over the question of Communist membership, left-wing activity in the constituencies was placing the Labour Party on its guard. Patrick Dollan believed that the effect of Communist infiltration and activity deprived Labour of the control of the Glasgow Town Council. However, the two major areas of Communist

19 Labour Party, Scottish Council, Conference Report, 1923, p.34-5.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid., Executive Minutes, January 7, 1924.

difficulty were Greenock and Paisley. In Greenock, a Communist, Geddes, had been endorsed as parliamentary candidate by the Trades and Labour Council in 1922 against the express instructions of the Scottish Labour Party. In May 1923 the Trades and Labour Council had unanimously decided to contest the seat in a future election and invited nominations from all affiliated bodies. In July John Paton was nominated by the ILP and when he became the sole nominee of August 4th, he went forward to be selected on October 4th. But on 27 September, Geddes - the former candidate - alleged that irregularities had occurred and moved that the selection conference be abandoned and that a new conference be held in January. This motion was carried by a majority. Geddes became chairman of the Trades Council. After a meeting with Shaw of the Labour Party on October 11th, Greenock ILP withdrew its delegates, (holding to Paton as a candidate)⁽²²⁾. The Scottish Executive refused endorsement of Geddes as Labour candidate for Greenock, disaffiliated the Trades and Labour Council, and took the decision to 'endeavour to reconstruct the local party on a separate basis in cooperation with the local organisations'⁽²³⁾. The results of these events were seen in the split candidates on the left in 1923.

In Paisley the dispute involved both Cooperative and Communist candidates, neither of whom seemed acceptable to the mainstream ILP. Biggar who had been candidate in 1922 was refused endorsement by Paisley Trades Council early in 1923, mainly it seems on the grounds he was a housing factor, but he was prevailed upon by the Cooperative Party to continue his candidature and it was agreed that between them the Cooperative and Labour Party Executives resolve the matter. However, Paisley Labour Council selected a communist, who was not 'acceptable to the Labour Party's Executive although he agreed to accept the constitution'⁽²⁴⁾.

22 Forward, October 27, November 3, 1923.

23 Ibid., November 24, 1923.

24 Forward, October 27, 1923.

Communist-Labour divisions went further than this. At the 1923 conference both Motherwell Trades and Labour Council and St Rollox appointed Communist members as delegates. Tradeston delegates moved that Communist delegates be admitted, but when the Chairman ruled this out of order only nine delegates out of 132 delegates voted in favour of challenging this ruling. However, while the Conference accepted the decision to ban Communists, it was not prepared to accept a motion, supported by the Executive, which argued for expulsion of any who publicly supported any person who was not a Labour Party Candidate, either locally or nationally approved, which in essence was a motion expelling members who supported Communists. From Leith, it was argued that: 'the resolution would be used to discipline the independents within their own ranks. It would be used to push out the 'Reds.' A motion effectively preventing discussion of the proposal was passed⁽²⁵⁾.

It was not simply Communists who brought organisational and political problems. Problems also arose with respect to the Cooperative Party. Following a national decision, the Scottish section of the Cooperative Union and the Scottish Committee of the Cooperative Party had been separated from the Cooperative and Labour Council. The Scottish Executive was urged to maintain 'friendly relations' with the Cooperative Party itself, but took the view that 'the creation of a separate party such as the Cooperative Party was likely to prove of doubtful value to the democratic movement'⁽²⁶⁾.

25 Labour Party, Scottish Conference, Report, 1923, p.31-33.

26 Labour Party, Scottish Executive, August 13, 1923. See also discussion in same body on May 28, 1923.

The problems were never really resolved throughout the 1920s, although there was no further occasion when Cooperative and Labour candidates stood against each other. The Scottish Executive, however, devoted a disproportionate amount of time to settling local disputes.

Left-wing militancy increased the pressure on the Labour Party to take action on unemployment. Unemployed Committees wrote asking it to push for higher Poor Law allowances for the unemployed and suggesting an 'all in' conference, which would include the Communist Party. These proposals were fiercely resisted, and all that emerged was merely a decision by the Parish Council Sub-Committee to organise a conference which would demand an increase in relief allowances and provision for paying rent by government grant. The conference was originally to include only Labour Parish councillors and representatives from divisional Labour Parties⁽²⁷⁾. But when it finally met, four representatives from the National Unemployed Workers' Committee were allowed to take part. The conference agreed to resist any reduction in living standards and came out in favour of a government subsidy to parish councils, and for the parish councils to pay the Board of Health minimum⁽²⁸⁾.

27 Labour Party, Scottish Executive Committee, October 1, 1923.

28 Labour Party, Scottish Conference, Executive Report, 1924, pp.11-12.

Levitt has shown how popular pressure from the unemployed was forcing the Government's hands and forcing also the Labour Party to react. The twin issues of housing and unemployment were dominant revealing the great poverty in the country. Only 8000 houses were planned for building in the next two and a half years. Glasgow, which had been 57,000 houses short in 1918, was according to Forward, 70,000 short and only 2,582 houses had been built between 1918 and May 1923⁽²⁹⁾. The pressure of these questions forced Labour's parliamentarians into action, - and revealed the splits within the Scottish Parliamentary group that were to dominate Labour's evolution throughout the twenties. The issue selected by James Maxton was the Circular 51 on the feeding of children by education authorities. According to Maxton the Circular deprived 10,000 schoolchildren of free school meals, and it was in the debate on Scottish estimates that he made his attack on government economies in milk supplied under child welfare schemes and in hospital accommodation for children:

I call the persons who sent that order murderers and the Hon.Gentlemen opposite who went into the division lobby in favour of that policy are murderers - cold callous murderers, with the blood of infants on their hands.(30)

Maxton's action was calculated and was followed by the suspension of Wheatley, Stephen, and Buchanan, as well as his. It was the signal for a campaign by Forward in the country. While MacDonald was opposed to the Clydesiders' behaviour, and the ILP ignored it nationally, Maxton and his colleagues had support in Scotland. Forward, Tom Johnston and Patrick Dollan backed their endeavours.

29. Forward, June 30, 1923.

30. House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, Vol.165, Col.2302.

The agitation to emphasise the squalor of Scottish conditions was conducted through a campaign on child welfare and then on the slums and on unemployment. Dollan who considered himself 'the backroom boy during the campaign' wrote that 'we kept feeding them with questions from Glasgow, I used to draft an average of fifteen or so a week on local grievances'⁽³¹⁾. Dollan summarised the effect of the year's work in Parliament in this way:

The Clyde Brigade hammered away for almost a year on topics arising from poverty. They alleged Scotland was the worst housed country in Europe. That its infant mortality was the worst in any civilised country. They alleged shipbuilding and engineering industries had been ruined by general indemnities. Wheatley and the others made a general case but James Maxton and George Buchanan chanted the poverty theme of Bridgeton and Gorbals in preference to any other theme. They made Bridgeton and Gorbals more notorious than the bowery of New York or Whitechapel in London. Correspondents came from America and London to study the so called blackspots of British civilisation.⁽³²⁾

With the Scottish Council increasingly an organisation for resolving disputes, it was left to the Independent Labour Party to prepare much of the organisation for the 1923 election. While the Scottish Council claimed that 66 divisional Labour Parties were in existence, only 15 affiliated to the 1923 Conference, with only six trades and labour councils in addition. There were only seventeen affiliated women's sections and four men's sections. None of them was in a rural area and most were in areas where the ILP dominated. The weakness in organisation was complemented by financial impoverishment. Scotland was not only demanding throughout the period more representation on the National Executive of the Labour Party in Britain but also more help to finance election campaigning, although the National Executive would not budge, the

31 P Dollan, Unpublished Autobiography, p.56-57.

32 Ibid., p.10.

National Agent, Wake, explaining on several occasions that additional funds could not be given. For example in May 1923 he was 're-emphasising the impracticability of the National Executive giving preferential treatment' to Scotland⁽³³⁾.

The ILP nationally was not much better off financially in 1923 than in 1922. By November it was found for Britain as a whole that more than one-third of its branches were in arrears⁽³⁴⁾. In these circumstances it was decided to grant election expenses of only £40 to each selected candidate and to refuse to guarantee financial assistance to any additional candidates. This time the £40 ceiling was also to apply to Scottish candidates⁽³⁵⁾. When the ILP Chairman, Clifford Allen, visited Scotland, his message was that 'Scotland received a very much bigger grant than any other division although the affiliation fees received from Scotland were less than those received from at least one other division'. This had, he said, led to 'strong criticism' from other areas and as a consequence a uniform system for grants that was to apply to the whole of Britain had been introduced. Through Patrick Dollan, the Scottish ILP attempted to secure a return to the old system, but he lost by five votes to three⁽³⁶⁾. But it was agreed the decision would apply only from the next ILP conference, and the Scottish ILP secured some breathing-space.

33 Labour Party Scottish Executive Minutes, May 28, 1923.

34 Independent Labour Party, National Administrative Council, November 15, 16, 1923.

35 Ibid. The ILP nationally also sought to bring the Scottish organisation into line over complying with the practice of reporting regularly on membership and activity, Ibid., March 30, 1923.

36 Ibid., January 7, 8, 1924.

But while the Scottish ILP were also to secure the extra concession of a grant for Central constituency, where a by-election had been feared, they failed in their requests for support for a candidate in Pollok and prior to the election they had been unable to secure a decision from the ILP nationally on their proposal for grants for a propaganda scheme in the Highlands 'with a view to running ILP candidates in a number of the constituencies at the next election'⁽³⁷⁾. By 1924, as ILP finances became more desperate, further restrictions on funding Scottish election expenses were to be introduced.

If the ILP had problems, the miners were in a more parlous state in 1923. While the miners had been able in 1923 to retain three of their four organisers to organise the nine constituencies the miners held, they had to reject additional requests for assistance⁽³⁸⁾. When Fife miners requested assistance for Kirkaldy Burghs constituency in February 1923, they were turned down,⁽³⁹⁾ and when the Fife miners requested an additional political organiser, it was decided after some hesitation that the existing political organisers must now have a more general remit throughout industrial Scotland⁽⁴⁰⁾. The miners, whose national membership had fallen substantially, were now clearly facing organisational difficulties, not least from the growth of Communist activity.

With the combination of these problems Labour fielded only five additional candidates in 1923 than in 1922. Even then its proportion of candidatures to seats was less (48 to 71) than

37 Ibid., January 25, 1924.

38 Scottish Mineworkers Union, Executive, January 5, 1923.

39 Ibid, February 5, 1923.

40 Ibid., May 22, 1923.

in England (360 out of 485) and Wales (27 out of 35). Labour was still standing in only just over two thirds of constituencies compared with three quarters in England and more than that in Wales. However, Labour fought all the seats it had contested in 1922, and in addition South Aberdeen, Inverness-shire, Hillhead, Partick and West Edinburgh. In Partick the party was to win in its first contest.

In 1923, average Labour election expenditure for forty-three candidates was only £428. But again the range in expenses betrayed the relative strengths and weaknesses of the Labour Party throughout the country. While Maxton spent only £113 in Bridgeton in securing his election, over £800-£821 was spent in Bute and North Ayr in the campaign. But again the picture is dominated by the miners whose expenses were all over £500. The miners spent more than £6000 in supporting their ten candidates at the election⁽⁴¹⁾.

41 Labour Party Scottish Council, Executive Report, 1924, pp.4-6.

II THE ANTI-SOCIALIST REASSESSMENT

For the anti-socialist forces, 1923 was a year for reassessment and reorganisation. The Unionists were stunned by their election losses in 1922 and spent much of their time analysing and interpreting the new mood in Scotland. Within the Party, a shift in strategy took place from a purely propagandist attack on the menace of revolutionary socialism to preparing to adopt a commitment to social reform. But the process was not to be complete until the late nineteen-twenties, and even in 1923 the preponderant issue was organising propaganda work against socialism.

One lesson that was not lost on the Conservatives was that despite electoral arrangements in 1922 Labour had won a majority of members in the West of Scotland 'due to the moderate vote being divided between two or three candidates'. Their Secretary's report to the Western Divisional Council concluded that in six seats 'there was a majority over the socialists of anti-socialist votes but these were divided'. The question that exercised the minds of Conservatives activists particularly in the West was how far the 1922 Labour victories had been a vote for socialist policies. The Secretary to the Western Divisional Council attributed 'the main causes of the Labour success in Scotland and the West of Scotland' to four factors:

1. The continued unemployment of great masses of the people leading to privation and discontent and to a disposition to let Labour have a chance to show what it could do.
2. The drastic reduction in the wages of those at work (and the suspicion that these are the result of a deliberate policy on the part of the employers and are not really necessitated by economic conditions).

3. The existing housing conditions, overcrowding, the slow progress in the building of houses.
4. The confident expectation raised by the Labour Party among the working class tenants that if they voted Labour they would get back a sum equivalent to a year's rent of their houses.

The last of these was probably the deciding factor in many of the constituencies, the report concluded, since:

In these time of hardship...it was this hope and expectation of an immediate pecuniary benefit to themselves which prompted many thousands of electors to vote Labour and not a sudden and wholesale conversion to the abstract doctrines of socialism.(1)

The House of Lords judgement - and Labour's promise of returning rents if elected - was regarded by the Unionists as a major reason for their defeat. While the Glasgow Unionist Association recognised that 'continued and widespread unemployment in our midst and the deplorable housing conditions' were important, they concluded that 'these would not in themselves have been sufficient to bring about a change had they not been reinforced by the judgement of the House of Lords in the Rent Act Appeal case'. This decision provided a potent weapon in the hands of the Labour Party which made fullest use of it⁽²⁾.

In fact some Conservatives came to believe that Labour's victory amounted to electoral bribery and that: 'the result of the election could not be interpreted as meaning that there had been a wholesale conversion of the electorate to the socialist creed; the large Labour vote was due to the passing circumstances of the time'⁽³⁾.

1 SUA Western Divisional Council, Report by Secretary, December 6, 1922.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

The Glasgow Unionist Association was undoubtedly clearer than the Western Divisional Council as to the way forward. The Conservatives 'needed a sound progressive policy as far removed from reaction as it is from revolution',⁽⁴⁾ and Scottish Unionists gradually came to be persuaded of the need for measures of social reform. The Party Chairman, Hope, himself believed that 'the loss of so many seats had been due to discontent', but that 'with improved trade there would be a reaction'⁽⁵⁾. Groups like the Women's Committee demanded action and were particularly concerned about the cost of living, especially the high cost of coal, as a reason for socialist support⁽⁶⁾. At the 1923 Conference the Unionists considered motions dealing with housing, the state of the economy, smallholdings, profit-sharing and pensions. However in 1923 it was difficult to get agreement as to what the policy direction should be and housing especially showed how far there was a division of opinion between moderate and laissez-faire Conservatives. While the conference recognised 'the extreme and vital importance of the need to meet the growing needs of the people and so relieve the widespread discomfort and allay the discontent arising from the present housing conditions,' it could only agree that 'in any new housing scheme which may be adopted, every encouragement and assistance be given to private enterprise'⁽⁷⁾. A motion arguing that 'until greater progress is made in housebuilding a continuation of the rent restriction act

4 SUA Glasgow Unionist Association, Annual Report, 1924.

5 SUA Western Divisional Council, January 10, 1923.

6 Ibid.

7 SUA Annual Conference, January 31, 1923.

without amendments...is necessary', was defeated. The Scottish Unionists could not even accept the proposal of the Glasgow Unionists, supported by the Western Divisional Council, that while decontrol of rents should be agreed, it should not be earlier than 1925⁽⁸⁾.

In fact the Conservative Government almost went further than their supporters in Scotland, mainly as a result of the influence of Walter Elliot who not only tried to defuse the militancy of the Clydesiders in the House of Commons, but also pressed within the Government for a better deal in the housing legislation for Scotland in Chamberlain's 1923 Housing Bill. While the flat rate subsidy of the bill was to be £6 per house, the Scottish Office asked for separate assessments in Scotland. Elliot was to tell the House of Commons of his disappointment that Scotland did not receive special treatment⁽⁹⁾.

While there was progress in accepting the Conservatives' need for a policy, little was achieved in 1923. The emphasis in Unionist circles remained on propaganda and education. When Glasgow Unionists agreed they needed a policy 'far removed from reaction', they also stressed in the same breath the need for political education against the menace of socialism. At the Scottish Conference a resolution was passed 'recognising in the recent general election in Scotland evidence of the urgent necessity for the definite study of political, economic and social problems, especially amongst the younger electorate', but the answer was to commend the work of the Workers League and the Imperialist Union. The Conference also urged their divisional councils to give 'immediate and careful consideration' to a

8 SUA Western Divisional Council, March 7, 1923.

9 Parliamentary Debates, April 24, 1923.

'continuous effort towards informing the public regarding politics, economics, and constitutional history'⁽¹⁰⁾. In addition to the positive political education in conservative principles, an attack on organisations like socialist Sunday schools was demanded 'in conjunction if possible with other constitutional organisations'⁽¹¹⁾.

When the Western Divisional Council invited a discussion on 'the best methods for the future combating of socialism' a number of propaganda suggestions were made. Conservative MPs were divided particularly over whether to hold party meetings or whether to work indirectly through other bodies. The People's League seemed a possible vehicle to some but in fact it went out of existence in 1923⁽¹²⁾. The combating of socialist propaganda in schools was demanded by others. The Women's Committee attributed the general election defeat to socialist Sunday schools and socialist teaching in the schools. McLaren, one of the Glasgow MPs, wanted 'something done to put an end to this practice'⁽¹³⁾. However it was reported to a later meeting of the Women's Committee that in fact no concrete case could be found of socialist propaganda work in the schools.

In fact Unionist propaganda work in 1923 saw an escalation of their previous tactics, full-time speakers, economic classes and the use of open air meetings and pamphlets. The Junior Imperialists were used as the youth wing of the movement, organising a summer tour of 350 meetings mainly round holiday resorts. A new leaflet 'Will Socialism Work', was produced for the West of Scotland⁽¹⁴⁾. It was

10 SUA Scottish Conference; January 31, 1923.

11 Ibid.

12 SUA Western Divisional Council, January 10, 1923.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid., May 2, 1923.

agreed that at women's meetings political speeches would now be given and indeed the Western Divisional Council's women's committee was particularly active in tightening up their organisation, demanding reports from constituencies 'giving a general idea of the work that is being done in the constituencies by Unionist men and women',⁽¹⁵⁾. Members of Parliament were pressed to be more active in constituency work,⁽¹⁶⁾ and the Conservatives also tried to centralise their organisation more tightly. Other organisations who were being financed through the Council were examined more closely to avoid 'unnecessary overlapping', and one victim was the proposal to restart the Primrose League in Scotland⁽¹⁷⁾..

One further conclusion that the party seemed to take from the election was the need to maintain as far as possible electoral arrangements. The Glasgow Unionist Association decided to urge upon 'all citizens of moderate and constitutional opinion the vital importance of active and combined effort to repel the forces of socialism'. During the Western Divisional Council's discussion of the matter, McLaren argued for 'fusion' between National Liberal and Conservatives 'as there was so little difference in policy' between them. McLeod felt it at least as 'important that all moderate parties should work together'.

Fusion was of course outside the power of the MPs and the Unionist Party in Scotland. But there was strong opposition to an early

15 Ibid., Women's Sub Committee, June 6, 1923.

16 Ibid., May 2, 1923.

17 SUA Central Council, May 23, September 5, 1923. This was 'inexpedient, being of the opinion that the Unionist Party can best be served by the concentration of Unionist activity in the hands of one united association as at present'. Central Council, 23 May.

election. While the Western Divisional Council welcomed Baldwin's decision for timely and adequate measures being taken to safeguard our industries, Scottish Unionists were unanimous in opposing an election⁽¹⁸⁾. On 9 November the Central Council Executive met to discuss 'the propriety of an early general election' and resolved that:

A general election before summer would be most detrimental to the party interests in Scotland where time must be given for preparation and education of the electorate and when the business community in their opinion is strongly against the disturbance of an early election.⁽¹⁹⁾

Liberal efforts in the aftermath of 1922 were directed less at new policy-making than at the resolution of their own deep divisions, but Liberal reunion was to be a slow and painful process, complicated by the existence of three groups of Liberals - not simply those who supported Lloyd George and Asquith but also those who refused to side with one or other. Asquith, it was alleged, wanted complete surrender, not reunion as an amalgamation of equal partners⁽²⁰⁾. But when Lloyd George came to Edinburgh in February 1923, he urged the end to recriminations and unity against 'the common enemy'⁽²¹⁾. But by the autumn of 1923 little had been achieved at a national level to reunite the party's disparate wings. Indeed in Scotland in July 1923, the Scottish Liberals' Secretary, Webster had reported to the Eastern Organising Committee of the Liberal Party:

18 SUA Western Divisional Council, November 7, 1923.

19 SUA Central Council, Executive, November 9, 1923.

20 M Kinnear, The Fall of Lloyd George, op.cit., p.208. Kinnear suggested that Hogge, the Edinburgh MP who was joint Liberal Whip and who favoured reunion was sacked to be replaced by the pro-Asquith Vivien Phillips, Ibid., p.212-3.

21 C Cook, Age of Alignment, op.cit., p.91.

National Liberals were evidently making an attempt to improve their organisation in various constituencies and had been, through their officials, offering their services to certain of the associations that still remained affiliated to us and in other cases trying to set up National Liberal organisations where they had none and these movements were evidently causing irritations in the constituencies and instead of helping to create an atmosphere for reunion were doing the very reverse.(22)

But Webster was able to add that in no known case had the movement to recruit existing Liberal Associations to the National Liberals been successful. In practice the Scottish Liberals took a moderate line with recalcitrant constituency associations as they attempted to woo them back into the fold. In Kirkcaldy and Dunfermline where the local Liberal Associations had been pro-Coalition, no action was taken despite their preparedness as Liberals to cooperate with the Unionists. The reason that was accepted by the Scottish Liberal Federation was that 'independent Liberals within these associations had made no breakaway themselves' (23). In two Highland constituencies, Ross and Cromarty, and Moray and Nairn, the same caution applied, although Liberal candidates had worked in cooperation with the Conservatives in defiance of the new rules and new Liberal associations had been created (24). This caution seemed justified because in seven constituencies - Partick, Montrose, Dundee, Roxburgh and Selkirk, Aberdeen, Moray and Nairn, and Western Isles - local Liberals managed to 'adjust their differences' just before the general election of 1923 (25). In Ross-shire, Inverness and Argyll, where differences remained beyond

22 SLF Eastern Organising Committee, July 13, 1923.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 SLA Report by Webster, December 19, 1923.

December 1923, the Executive were to postpone immediate action in the hope that agreement might still be reached locally, although the only associations affiliated to the Federation did not recognise the Liberal members of Parliament. Dumbarton Burghs Association was however out on a limb, although it applied for re-affiliation, because it had jointly selected a candidate with the Unionists⁽²⁶⁾.

With caution the guiding principle of the Scottish Liberal Federation and its committees, much was left for local resolution. In Ross and Cromarty, for example, it was impossible for Liberals and National Liberals to reach agreements despite long discussions. While the Liberal Whip, McKenzie Wood, recommended Liberal support for the incumbent National Liberal MP, McPherson, (and indeed the one branch - Cromarty - that had led the breakaway, and McPherson's opponent of 1922 were in favour of reunion), the Easter Ross Liberals wanted to place their own candidate in the field. It led the Unionists, who had wanted to support a Liberal candidate, to change their mind about withdrawal. But in the event there was no opponent prepared to make the challenge⁽²⁷⁾. In Western Isles, similar difficulties were encountered as both Ramsay, the National Liberal, and McKenzie Livingston, the Liberal, sought nomination. While the United Liberal Election Committee in Western Isles selected McKenzie Livingston as a candidate, it required Head Office intervention to achieve a mediation between the two sides. When a further Independent Liberal announced his intention of entering the contest, it was agreed after a joint conference of the two Liberal wings that headquarters would select the candidate⁽²⁸⁾. In Argyllshire, the real complaint of the Liberals was that Sir William Sutherland who had been a National Liberal Member had been adopted without consultation with them. Thus they disputed his

26 Ibid.

27 Glasgow Herald, November 21, 1923.

28 Ibid., November 22, 23, 1923.

adoption and gave him no active support⁽²⁹⁾. But in Moray and Nairn it was possible for the Liberals to resolve their disputes without alternative candidates. Liberals in Moray and Nairn were unhappy with the National Liberal MP Guthrie's support for the Safeguarding of Industries Bill. But the Executive (by 29 votes to 12) and the association (by 86 votes to 13) agreed to confirm his adoption⁽³⁰⁾.

29 Ibid., November, 22, 1923

30 Ibid., November 23, 28, 1923.

III THE CAMPAIGN AND ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

Labour was pleased at the early dissolution of the 1922 Parliament. As Dollan recalls the Scottish ILP 'were delighted and believed they would return to Westminster in increased numbers'⁽¹⁾. With Labour already the largest party in seats, there was little Conservative enthusiasm for a new contest. But, as Cowling suggests, Baldwin was anxious to use protection as the issue that would separate the Coalition Conservatives from the Free Trade Liberals⁽²⁾. It would, Baldwin calculated, unite the Conservatives again. His Scottish Secretary, Viscount Novar, who was consulted only rarely, complained about the decision and argued for a referendum, warning that the election might result 'in handing over the fortunes of the country to the socialist party'⁽³⁾.

Younger advised Baldwin that the prevailing feeling in Scotland was against an immediate election⁽⁴⁾, and the Scotsman reflected right-wing opinion when it argued for 'a counsel of delay':

the demand for an early election creates a situation akin to that which developed out of the coalition over one year ago when Unionist feeling in Scotland was sharply divorced from Unionist opinion in the South. Among Unionist opinion in Scotland there is a strong preponderance of opinion that an immediate dissolution - whoever was responsible for the idea - is not only inopportune but dangerous. That does not imply any hesitation in accepting the large policy of imperial trade development...but unless the issue is made perfectly clear, it will be impossible to disentangle the true from the false, and while Unionists and Liberals are cutting each other's throats, under the impression that their difference is a matter of vital principle instead

1 P Dollan, op.cit., p.25.

2 For a fuller discussion see M Cowling, op.cit., pp.275-330.

3 Novar to Baldwin, November 8, 1923. cited in C Cook, Age of Alignment. p.116.

4 Younger to Baldwin, November 7, 1923 in C Cook, op.cit., p.120.

of merely a question of expediency, the socialist party . will escape the criticism...and may attain a semblance of strength and authority which will seriously affect the stability of the position in the next Parliament.(5)

Throughout the year in fact Younger had urged that whatever happened in England, Scottish Unionists should seek electoral arrangements with the Liberals and National Liberals. Writing in June 1923 to the Scotsman editor privately to explain his position, Younger said:

If the parties in the North have any sense they will make a mutual arrangement with regard to seats at the next election. Wherever there has been a seat with a distinct Liberal tradition it should unhesitatingly be given a moderate Liberal who should be supported by our people, and in return wherever we have a hold, although it may be a smaller one, they ought to support our man. In no other way can Labour in many constituencies be defeated and so far as I am concerned I should gladly do anything to facilitate such an arrangement.(6)

The Scotsman editor argued that:

The Diehards have already made it very hard for us in Scotland. If their influence prevails in the future as it has in the past Unionism in Scotland will be ruined.(7)

5 Scotsman, November 12, 1923.

6 Editor of Scotsman to Gilmour, June 4, 1923. Gilmour Papers.

7 Ibid., GD/383/18, May 29, 1923.

Later he was to add:

Scotland stands in very unpleasant relation to the Government. I have a note from Younger in which he admits the Scottish situation is very bad. (8)

Younger was to be asked whether he had 'any practical proposals' for a pact.

On 9 November, prior to the declaration of the election, the Central Council Executive had concluded that 'a general election before summer would be most detrimental to the party interest in Scotland'⁽⁹⁾, and Horne, understandably, was 'much perturbed' by Baldwin's 'ill-considered and hastily improvised action'⁽¹⁰⁾. In Scotland, backbench opinion was also opposed. In these circumstances Younger's advice to Baldwin was clear. He had opposed an election and he wanted arrangements in Scotland with the Liberals. Writing to Baldwin in November he stated:

I have been urging some arrangement with the Liberals towards three-cornered contests and I have gone so far as to discuss this with both Pringle and Hogge. Now however, that Asquith...is going to make the fiscal policy a party question I suppose all chance of any agreement has gone.(11)

Younger was later to say as much in public. He had never been so uncertain about the outcome of any election, and he urged that: 'the fight be made on not about protection or free trade but about socialism. He felt that Conservatives could win on the issue of the capital levy which ought to be played for all its worth by Conservative candidates'.

8 Ibid., June 4, 1923.

9 SUA Central Council, Executive, November 9, 1923.

10 Macallum Scott Diary, November 13, 1923, Cited in C Cook, op.cit., p.122.

11 Younger to Baldwin, November 7, Baldwin Papers, Cited in C Cook, Age of Alignment, op.cit., p.131.

What were the chances then of cooperation between Liberals and Unionists in 1923? The discussions in the Glasgow Central constituency, where a by-election was expected prior to the announcement of the General Election, demonstrated the possibilities, but also problems, of cooperation. With agreement between the Liberals and National Liberals relatively straightforward, Churchill was seen as a natural candidate⁽¹²⁾. But when he and later Sir Thomas Paxton declined, the Glasgow Herald pressed for the selection of a free trade Unionist with Liberal support as the sole anti-socialist candidate. There was, said the Herald: 'a perceptible feeling in favour of some compromise being reached with the Unionists. In some quarters it was thought that if both Unionist and Liberal candidates entered the field there was nothing to prevent a Labour victory...the Liberal view was that if the Unionists adopted a free trader they would stand aside'⁽¹³⁾. The Scotsman was of the same view and indeed two free trade Unionist candidates were considered. But when the general election was declared over the issue of free trade and protection, cooperation became more difficult and eventually two candidates, one Liberal and one Unionist, stood in the contest.

In Glasgow therefore, as the election campaign began, it seemed that despite a desire for cooperation, the competition over free trade and protection would make it impossible to achieve. But the Unionists made further attempts to secure agreements. As the Chairman of the Glasgow Unionist Association was to record, 'it had been found impossible to get the Liberals to come to terms'⁽¹⁴⁾.

12 Glasgow Herald, November 5, 1923.

13 Ibid., November, 13, 15, 1923.

14 Glasgow Unionist Association, December 24, 1923.

In fact, several constituencies did have only one anti-socialist candidate, and in others there were discussions to achieve that. In Govan and Shettleston, the Unionists stood down to leave a clear field to the Liberals. In Camlachie Unionists had a clear run. In Partick a free trade Unionist was chosen by the Conservatives, thus appeasing the Liberal Party on the question of protection. But in Springburn the Unionists had been prepared to stand down and in Tradeston an unofficial delegation from the Liberals had approached the Unionists for an agreement that did not eventually transpire. What had been under discussion was a pact whereby the Liberals stood down in Gorbals in return for the Unionists standing down in Tradeston. Thus, when talks broke down, the Unionists adopted their candidate in Gorbals⁽¹⁵⁾. But Glasgow found, as did other parts of Scotland, that the Liberals nationally wanted to encourage candidates even at the last minute. McKenzie Wood, the Liberal Whip, intervened in Central, Kelvingrove, Shettleston, and Govan constituencies to secure last minute Liberal intervention⁽¹⁶⁾.

In the circumstances of the election it was perhaps remarkable that any basis for cooperation existed. But throughout Scotland it was possible to secure Unionist or Liberal withdrawals in a united front against Labour. The Unionists showed themselves ready to

15 Glasgow Unionist Association, Annual Report, January 1923. As the report stated for Shettleston, 'The Liberals had Mr Robertson prepared to fight and we agreed to support him rather than split the vote'. In Govan it was to 'the members' regret' they had been unable to field a candidate.

16 Glasgow Herald, November 19, 1923.

withdraw in most cases. In the Highland and North seats, they were reluctant to pursue candidatures and four seats in Caithness, Ross and Comarty, Banff, and Inverness went uncontested at all. But it was in the constituencies where Labour posed a threat that most interest was taken. In Greenock, the Unionists supported the Liberal candidate Sir Geoffrey Collins, on the grounds that 'communism would be ruinous', and the socialists should be defeated⁽¹⁷⁾. In Falkirk and Stirling Burghs, a sub-committee of the Unionists met the Liberals and agreed that they should both support the former MP, Sir George MacCrae⁽¹⁸⁾. In Hamilton, the Unionists stood down, believing that their action would encourage the Liberals to reciprocate in neighbouring constituencies⁽¹⁹⁾. In the two member constituency of Dundee, Unionists at first rejected the advice of their President that there be only one Unionist candidate and by a majority agreed to place two Unionists in the field⁽²⁰⁾. But the second Unionist candidate, Lady Baxter, a prominent member of the Unionists' Eastern Divisional Council, wrote to the President withdrawing, on the grounds that after 'repeated consultations' it seemed advisable to field only one Unionist Candidate⁽²¹⁾.

Thus in the constituencies there appeared to be a willingness to consider pacts and arrangements, if proper terms could be agreed. In Glasgow, possible arrangements in at least five constituencies had been discussed. The Scotsman itself speculated early on in the campaign that arrangements might also be possible in Aberdeen, Perth, Ayr, Roxburgh, Galloway, Montrose, and in the two Stirlingshire constituencies⁽²²⁾. In fact, there was

17 Ibid., December 4, 1923.

18 Ibid., November 21, 1923.

19 Ibid., November 21, 1923.

20 Ibid., November 20, 1923.

21 Ibid., November 23, 1923.

22 Scotsman, November 14, 1923.

considerable talk of an agreement in Stirlingshire whereby Unionists would stand down in the East constituency while Liberals stood down in the West. But the possibility of an agreement was ruined by the determination of the Bridge of Allan Liberal association to contest the West constituency. Equally, while the Unionists expected that their decision to withdraw in Hamilton might encourage agreements throughout Lanarkshire, they were to be disappointed⁽²³⁾. In the North Lanark constituency the Unionist Executive attempted to reach an understanding with the Liberals whereby in North Lanark Liberals would stand down while in another seat the Unionists would withdraw. But again the possibility of a pact was undermined by the Liberals' decision in North Lanark to approach the Unionists with a view to securing Unionist withdrawal in favour of a Liberal candidate they had already selected⁽²⁴⁾.

In contrast, while the Liberals accepted the Unionist support given them in straight fights with Labour, the Liberals were less keen to stand down in favour of Unionists. In Dumbarton Burghs however the Liberal Association agreed to joint meetings with the Unionists to consider candidates and a joint selection conference resolved to field a Unionist in preference to the Liberal⁽²⁵⁾. Although the vote was 36 to 22, the Liberals gave the Unionist loyal support⁽²⁶⁾. As the Liberals' Scottish Secretary was to report later, 'The association actually joined on equal terms with the Tory association to adopt a Tory candidate'⁽²⁷⁾.

23 Glasgow Herald, November 16, 1923

24 Ibid., November 21, 23, 1923.

25 Glasgow Herald, November 20, 1923.

26 Ibid., November 23, 1923.

27 Scottish Liberal Federation, Report by Webster, December 19, 1923.

What appears however to have killed chances of a wider pact was the determination of Scottish Liberal headquarters to achieve a presence in as many constituencies as possible. Prior to the dissolution, there were only four Liberal candidates in addition to the sitting Liberal members, making thirty two candidatures in all. Within eight days another twenty eight candidates were placed in the field, most by central office⁽²⁸⁾. As the party's election report made clear, 22 were placed through the Edinburgh or Glasgow offices. The Liberal conclusion was that had there been more candidates available, five or six more constituencies could have been contested, but the party recognised that 'in most cases, they were undertaking difficult and almost hopeless fights'⁽²⁹⁾.

There were in the end twenty-seven seats where no Liberal or Conservative stood together against Labour (including Dundee's two seats). In eleven it was a Conservative who stood - and in sixteen a Liberal. There was an equal number of constituencies where three cornered contests ensued between Conservative, Liberal and Labour. In not all of these were discussions held between the right-wing parties about one or other of their candidates standing down, but the evidence suggests that in at least another twenty three, regarded as being threatened by Labour, some form of discussion took place.

It seems clear that even where arrangements were not reached the Unionists in Scotland did not push their support of protection as a major issue in the campaign. Even the Unionist Free Trade Club of Glasgow and West of Scotland decided that while it adhered to its belief in free trade as the basis of the country's prosperity it recommended its members in view of the danger of splitting the moderate vote, to support other candidates where they had no .

28 Ibid., December 19, 1923.

29 Ibid.

opportunity of voting for a Unionist Free Trader. In fact it seems that the Unionists adopted a variety of views as candidates on the issue of protection, most of them nebulous. Some claimed they wanted 'a free hand', others an 'open mind'; others were 'temporarily protectionist', and others 'free trade retaliators',⁽³⁰⁾. For Gilmour, 'strict adherence either to tariff reform or free trade as we have known them in the past was impracticable'. It was 'a question of hard business facts and of necessity',⁽³¹⁾.

Protection was less the issue in Scotland than socialism. The Liberal candidate in Shettleston who was supported by the Unionists said, 'the issue in Shettleston is socialism. The tariff question does not arise',⁽³²⁾. In St Rollox, the Liberal candidate said: 'many Liberals in St Rollox...had told her they would rather vote for protection than socialism...she was making it her business to stand as a moderate candidate against socialism',⁽³³⁾. In Hamilton, the Unionist candidate said that:

There was a marked distinction between the question at issue at the present time - tariff reform - and another broader question that of socialism...they were up against a form of socialism that would disintegrate society, abolish the sanctity of family life and create corruption and despair.⁽³⁴⁾

In some cases the issue between Liberal and Conservative was simply who was the best anti-socialist candidate.

30 Glasgow Herald, November 22, 1923.

31 Election Address, 1923, Gilmour Papers GD/383/15.

32 Glasgow Herald, December 4, 1923.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

Cook has suggested:

The election of 1923 rather than split of 1916, the coupon election or any earlier date, was perhaps the crucial moment when the Liberal decline became its downfall...when the election came in 1923, the Liberals were still thought of as a potential party of government but not really so in 1924 and certainly not in 1929. Conceivably if the Liberals had become the second largest party in 1923 their subsequent history would have been very different.(35)

Yet on the face of it the election results of 1923 confirmed the Liberal hopes for a recovery. The results appeared to show that a three party system in Scotland was a real possibility. Indeed the Liberals not only won their highest proportion of votes in the inter-war years (29.7%) but in the seats contested, their average vote - 9125 - was marginally higher than that of the Conservatives. However a close examination of the picture casts doubts both on the significance of the recovery and the reality of a three party system. In four of their seats, (Caithness, Ross and Cromarty, Banff, and Inverness) the Liberals were returned unopposed. And in only three seats did the Liberals win in a three cornered contest, two of these wins being in unusual circumstances. While in Edinburgh West the Liberals did well to come top of the poll in a three cornered contest, in which Labour came third, Asquith's victory in Paisley was only achieved because of a damaging split in the Labour vote (with a Labour and Independent Labour candidate) and in Western Isles, the left-wing opponent was not an officially endorsed Labour candidate. All the remaining Liberal seats in industrial or semi-industrial areas - Leith, Greenock, Montrose - were won because of Conservative withdrawals, but even that could not retain Kirkcaldy which reverted to Labour in a two party contest. In the rural areas on the other hand, the party retained

35 C Cook, op.cit., p.341.

its seats because there was no Labour intervention. In 1924, when Labour intervened for the first time, almost all of the Liberal Party's North East, Eastern and Borders seats were to fall to the Conservatives. In three party contests, the party was in fact unable to hold Kilmarnock, even with the new candidature of Sir Donald Maclean, or Roxburgh and Selkirk.

Interestingly, of the ten seats Labour won on minority votes in three party contests involving Labour; Liberal and Conservative, it was the Conservative Party - not the Liberal Party - which was the runner up, with the exception only of the Kilmarnock constituency. To the Scotsman the election demonstrated the futility, rather than vitality of a three party system, as they argued 'the folly of recklessly splitting the anti-socialist vote'.

TABLE 5.1

Election Results in Scotland/Great Britain 1923

Share of vote by parties

	<u>SCOTLAND</u>	<u>GREAT BRITAIN</u>
Conservative	31.6%	38.0%
Liberal	28.4%	29.7%
Labour	35.9%	30.7%

TABLE 5.2

1923 Election : Average votes by parties

Conservative	9010
Liberal	9125
Labour	11090

Source: F W Craig, British Parliamentary Election Results,
as cited above.

While the Scotsman added there had been a desire on the part of important representatives of the Unionist and Liberal Parties to avoid these 'suicidal contests', unfortunately local difficulties generally intervened⁽³⁶⁾.

The Unionists did badly. Their average vote was lower than at any election of the twenties and they won only 9010 votes on average, contrasted with Labour's 11,090. But while the Liberals had won only three three-cornered contests the Unionists had won eight. It led the Scotsman to argue that 'Unionism in Scotland had held its own but Liberalism had lost heavily to socialism'⁽³⁷⁾. In fact the party did retain almost all its middle class constituencies, in Glasgow, Aberdeen, Ayrshire and Edinburgh although the Liberals won Edinburgh North. Success in Motherwell was the result of Communist intervention and could not be considered lasting. But four rural seats had completed their passage from Liberals to Conservatives, (Moray and Nairn, Roxburgh, Aberdeenshire West, and Kinross and West Perthshire). It was to be the shape of things to come.

The 1923 election is seen by Cook as demonstrating 'an advance by Labour into the remaining Liberal strongholds in the Industrial areas'. In fact while in Britain Labour made forty-one gains in industrial constituencies, only four of these were secured in Scotland. It demonstrated how much the Liberal vote had been eroded in earlier contests⁽³⁸⁾. But the Labour advance was daunting - winning not only eighteen three-cornered contests with Unionists and Liberals, but also sixteen in straight fights with either Unionist or Liberals. The Scotsman was in no doubt as to the main trend of the election:

The advance of socialism in our midst is the most unpleasant feature of the situation. Formerly its strength lay mainly in Glasgow and the Clyde and the industrial parts of Lanarkshire but it has now spread its tentacle considerably in Eastern Scotland particularly in the mining areas bordering on the farms.⁽³⁹⁾

37 Ibid.

38 C Cook and J Taylor, op.cit., pp.86-87.

39 Scotsman, December 8, 1923.

Indeed the results belied potential Labour gains in other seats which as the Labour executive concluded were not won 'through unfortunate local circumstances'. In Greenock, Paisley, Motherwell and Kelvingrove the party considered that the Labour divisions which had produced Communist interventions had prevented victory⁽⁴⁰⁾. The party also believed that Falkirk and Stirling had been lost because of 'the old ruse of too successful an endeavour to emphasise differences of religion'⁽⁴¹⁾.

The Labour Party won twelve seats it would lose mainly as a result of straight fights in 1924 (but recover again in 1929) but although the party won only one additional seat, Kirkcaldy, that it would not lose again in the twenties, the most important fact of the election results was that the party's hold on the twenty seats it had won either in 1918 or 1922 was confirmed. These would not fall from the party's grasp throughout the twenties. Despite fighting only two-thirds of the Scottish constituencies, Labour's share of the vote was higher than that in Britain and its vote in the industrial areas was impressive. In twenty-seven of its thirty four wins, Labour had a majority of the votes cast. If the Liberals had come close to being the alternative to Labour in England, Labour had almost won an outright majority in Scotland.

40 Labour Party Scottish Executive Report, 1924.

41 Ibid.

CHAPTER 6

THE 1924 ELECTION

I LABOUR ORGANISATION

Few were in any doubt about the importance as well as the inevitability of a general election in 1924. Sir Robert Horne called it 'the most crucial election that has taken place within living memory'(1). It was 'not an ordinary political contest' said Sir John Gilmour⁽²⁾. Labour had in fact only governed for nine months when it was brought down by the combined vote of Liberals and Conservatives. On the surface defeat came over the handling of the Campbell Case - the dropping of prosecution proceedings against the Communist editor of the Workers' Weekly - but an election had been seen as inevitable for some time before.

Ramsay MacDonald had resisted a number of options open to him as the first Labour Prime Minister. Liberals had expected MacDonald to request a form of pact or agreement on a parliamentary programme. That had not happened. Others like Maxton had hoped Labour would reject office outright and that there would be a Liberal-Conservative pact:

The proper thing to do was for the statesmen to form a Liberal-Tory coalition. Let them call themselves the Centre or Moderate Party...and prove that private enterprise was the right method of managing the industrial and commercial affairs of the country. Let them take one or two years to demonstrate that fact.

1 Glasgow Herald, 16 October, 1924.

2 Glasgow Herald, 23 October 1924.

Even Dollan was to argue that taking office was 'the biggest mistake of MacDonald's career'⁽³⁾. Other sections of the left had expected a Labour Government to set up a series of commissions to report quickly while the party dealt with the question of short-term distress amongst the unemployed. But MacDonald consulted none of the Scottish left in secluding himself in Lossiemouth to make his decision to govern⁽⁴⁾.

The Labour Government of 1924 was hardly a success by anyone's standards. The policy and achievement of the government might be divided into three areas -where the party had policies and there was limited success; where the party's policies were deficient and little was done except to muddle through; and where the party had policies but for one reason or another no action was taken. Scottish Labour was pleased by the immediate recognition of Russia and the opening of negotiations for a trade treaty, and by the renegotiation of reparations from Germany under the Dawes plan. Equally internationalism flourished with the first steps towards the Geneva Protocol. In part, of course, the government benefited from an improved atmosphere internationally but MacDonald was following through lines of policy supported by the Labour Party since 1918. Where disagreement arose was on how far MacDonald should go, for example, on a sanctions clause in the Geneva Protocol, the scaling down of reparations to cover only devastated territories, and moves towards disarmament⁽⁵⁾.

3 P Dollan, Unpublished Autobiography, p.25.

4 Macdonald's role is traced more fully in D Marquand, Ramsay MacDonald (London, 1978).

5 Labour Party (Scottish Council), Conference Report, 1924, p.26.

In housing policy, Wheatley was acting on lines laid down by the ILP and indeed by the Scottish Council of the Labour Party, firstly, to encourage local authorities to build houses, and, secondly, to build houses exclusively for rent⁽⁶⁾. To a lesser extent Wheatley achieved Labour's aim to halt evictions (but not without several outbursts from Scottish Labour members over rent strikes in Clydebanks), and when the Government fell, his second bill on rent controls was about to be introduced. In other areas of social policy welcome, if moderate progress was made. The gap between covenanted and insured benefits was abolished; the testing of applicants for uncovenanted benefits abolished; and the benefits for insured persons raised. But no new machinery of national measures to help the unemployed was created, despite the demands made early in 1924 at the party's Scottish Conference. Conference urged then 'that the Government must deal with unemployment as a national charge and concern, by either providing work at recognised standard rates of wages or providing for the adequate maintenance of the unemployed'⁽⁷⁾. Although a motion laying down specific sums for 'adequate maintenance' was defeated, Conference went on to urge that in the meantime parish councils should be provided with Government grants to cover the rents of the unemployed⁽⁸⁾.

In other areas Labour was to prove a disappointment to its own supporters. On Imperial questions, little progress was made. 'The Labour Party were proud and jealous of, and were prepared to maintain, the Empire', said J H Thomas. Despite the growing scepticism of free trade, little was said or done. But on economic questions as a whole - the Budget strategy and the relief of unemployment - Labour's measures were completely inadequate.

6 A fuller study is included in R Middlemass, The Clydesiders, (London, 1965), and R Lyman, The First Labour Government, 1924 (London, 1952). As Dollan later wrote, the 1924 Act was 'the death sentence passed on the Scottish but-and-ben house', (Dollan, Unpublished Autobiography, p.26).

7 Scottish Conference Report, p.39.

8 Ibid., p.39.

At the outset the Labour Party in Scotland were vigorous in their defence of the Government, despite, as Dollan recalls, the Clyde Brigade's anger after failing in their desire that 'Tom Johnston and James Maxton at least should have been included in the Cabinet or in the Government',⁽⁹⁾. Ramsay MacDonald had been unable to attend a mass demonstration planned to coincide with his taking office. But William Shaw, Chairman of the party, said: 'the accession to office of Ramsay MacDonald' and the first Labour Government was welcomed by the entire Labour Movement...the leader is a man who in the past has had the courage of his convictions',⁽¹⁰⁾. The March Conference of the Scottish Council pledged itself 'in every possible way to ensure the success of the present and the first Labour Government',⁽¹¹⁾ and an extensive national campaign of support was organised with meetings throughout the summer in Dundee, Kilmarnock, Hawick, Aberdeen, Montrose, Inverness, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Stirling, Hamilton, Galashiels, Peebles, and Dumfries - in other words in rural as well as urban centres⁽¹²⁾. At the Scottish Conference Agnes Dollan could say the decision to take office had been 'justified by the government record of the first few months',⁽¹³⁾.

9 P Dollan, Unpublished Autobiography, p.26. It is not clear why Maxton was excluded. Dollan suggests Maxton was offered a parliamentary undersecretaryship but 'he declined on the advice of Wheatley who wanted him in the Cabinet'. Dollan suggests MacDonald was sensitive to 'the fear of the Anglo Saxons against too many Scots in the Cabinet'.

10 Scottish Conference Report, p.26.

11 Scottish Conference Report, 1924, p.30.

12 Scottish Executive Report, 1925, p.15.

13 Scottish Conference Report, 1924, p.28.

From Paisley John Gormley congratulated the party and government, arguing that 'the Labour Government was a credit to the working class and had achieved more in a few weeks than preceding Governments had done in as many years',⁽¹⁴⁾.

Even those who had opposed taking power were anxious to show their support and backing for MacDonald against the anti-socialist press. For the first few months Maxton gave the Government support. He was impressed by MacDonald's responsibility, he said, and the Cabinet man for man was twice as good as any previous one. MacDonald and the Cabinet could rely that the Clydesiders would not cause a split⁽¹⁵⁾. But from the outset Maxton also defended his right to criticise, and before Easter he was stating clearly what he considered to be the role of the Scottish and British Labour left:

The Labour Government would have nothing but the most loyal and faithful support from the Clyde so long as the Labour Movement remained true to the great principles of the Labour and Socialist Movement. They would not harass the Government about the slowness of going forward, so long as they were going forward, but if for one moment the Labour Movement turned its back upon the great principles or the millions of men who toiled to put them there, he hoped the men from the Clyde would rise up and protest and demand that no consideration of expediency or office or personal vanities or dignities would be allowed to divert the great Labour Movement from the path it had been designed to tread.⁽¹⁶⁾

Maxton criticised the appointment of MacMillan as Scotland's Solicitor General, as well as the appointment of the Tory Lord Chelmsford to the Admiralty, results, as he saw it, of pressure from the Lords and the Faculty of Advocates.

14 Scottish Conference Report, 1924, p.31.

15 Maxton's comments appeared in the Glasgow Herald, Forward and the Glasgow Eastern Standard. He was later to write a regular column in New Leader.

16 Ibid.

While Smillie chaired and Maxton was a member of the new Parliamentary Labour Party Liaison Committee of three Ministers and twelve MPs to resolve differences, the Scottish left under Maxton were responsible for Government embarrassments in House of Commons votes. On three occasions within the first three months, he voted against the Government over credits to Sudan, the Army estimates, and the trade facilities Bill, but as Maxton claimed he had only dissented 'when they (the Labour Government) had the enthusiastic support of Hon Members opposite and below the Gangway', and indeed he accepted the omission of the capital levy and other socialist measures from Snowden's first budget. However from Easter he complained about the slowness of the Government's progress. He wanted reforms 'at the earliest possible moment' he said in April. In July he demanded 'radical improvements', claiming 'the government were only being given time to deliver the goods'.

A major Scottish question was the evictions in Clydebanks of unemployed persons. When Parliament rejected Wheatley's bill to halt evictions, Maxton urged MacDonald to hold an election, stating he was prepared to take direct action to halt the evictions. Maxton said: 'I warn our Front bench that unless they secure the homes of the people of Glasgow I will use force in the streets of Glasgow defending them'.

Maxton was speaking for many of the Clydeside MPs when in August at the ILP summer school he concluded that:

He did not think that the Labour Government should have office as a minority government to do little things in administration, which they could do little better than the Liberals or Tories. They were returned to Parliament to make fundamental changes...if there was a movement in which there has been fools, twisters and crooks it has been our movement...we in Parliament have to keep the pressure up on the Cabinet to keep them as common men.

The Scottish left within the Independent Labour Party were not alone in Scotland in advocating a bolder course. The STUC in 1924 demanded credit control, national ownership of oil, railways and other industries, an eight hour day and pensions after fifty five, amongst other proposals. With the Executive of the Labour Party a joint committee was formed to urge 'speedy action from the Government',⁽¹⁷⁾ Labour's Chairman, William Shaw, was demanding national schemes of productive work and maintenance⁽¹⁸⁾.

The growing strength of support for Communist membership and involvement in Scotland was illustrative of a further shift leftwards, which saw Scottish Conference move in 1924 much to the left of the Scottish Executive and the Labour Party nationally. The key dividing line was communist membership. Communist involvement in the Labour Party remained something of an anomaly : while they could not be individual members, it appeared they could be accepted as delegates through their trade unions and at the 1924 Scottish Conference it was estimated by the party's Chairman that of one hundred and fifty 'not less than twenty Communists' were registered⁽¹⁹⁾.

A motion for the affiliation of unemployed committees had been sponsored through the National Unemployed Workers Movement and indirectly by the Communists. In 1923 the motion to accept this in principle had been successful but its implementation thwarted by the Scottish Executive. In 1924 it was argued successfully that the proper role for unemployed representation was through their previous trade unions, but the vote was a narrow one reflecting the strength of the left, with forty-five in favour of the change and sixty-nine against⁽²⁰⁾.

17 Labour Party, Scottish Conference Report, 1924, p.27.

18 Ibid., p.36.

19 Scottish Executive Committee, 7 January, 1924.

20 Scottish Conference Report, 1924, p.32-33.
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On the question of Communist Party membership, a compromise had to be reached. In 1923 there had been little dispute over the exclusion of Communists. In 1924, however, the Aberdeen Trades and Labour Council again moved for Communist Party affiliation, arguing that for the last two years the party had been working quite harmoniously with the Labour Party in local and national elections. The point was also made that there were communists in the local Trades Councils and representing trades unions in local parties⁽²¹⁾. William Shaw, the party's chairman at the time, argued that he did not object to Communist membership but the issue raised a question of discipline and that the Executive should be left to consider an application by the Communist Party as 'a question' for 'negotiation'⁽²²⁾.

Hugh Lyon, of the Scottish Horse and Motormen's Association, went further:

The Communists would put new vigour into the Party. A few months ago they were a working class party but now they had three Lords in the Cabinet. Even the ILP needed to be wakened up as it would appear the success of Labour had lulled them into inactivity.⁽²³⁾

The motion supporting Communist affiliation was first amended by 38 to 26 votes, to include a qualification that Communists be accepted 'on the same basis as other affiliated organisations' and then further modified by a resolution from Glasgow Trades Council that the National Executive negotiate with the Communists, which passed

21 Labour Party, Scottish Council, Conference Report, 1924, p.36.

22 Ibid., p.36.

23 Ibid., p.37.

by 57 to 44. The final resolution embodying these proposals was accepted by 66 votes to 22 - making the party in Scotland far more pro-Communist than the Labour Party nationally⁽²⁴⁾.

Local problems remained, however, to create difficulties between the parties. The Executive Report in 1924 referred to Greenock, Paisley, Kelvingrove, and Motherwell as 'all potential Labour seats which were not won through unfortunate local circumstances',⁽²⁵⁾ implying that Communist candidatures had hurt the party's performance. But the Conference amended the report to stress that Paisley was 'the only division in Scotland in which 'two working class candidates' had gone to the polls in 1923'⁽²⁶⁾. Greenock was a major and irresolvable problem. The Scottish Executive was asked by the National Office to reconstruct the Greenock Trades and Labour Party, with the ILP pressing for a distinct local Labour Party separate from the Trades Council⁽²⁷⁾. The bone of contention, however, that could not be resolved was the affiliation to the Trades Council of a Housing Association and an Unemployed Committee, both in the control of Communists. Greenock Trades Council was therefore disaffiliated. When Motherwell Trades and Labour Council were also under threat of disaffiliation, they compromised by banning their housing and unemployed committee delegations and were allowed to proceed with nominations for a candidate⁽²⁸⁾.

24 Labour Party Scottish Conference Report, 1924, p.38. The motion that was passed read: 'In view of the decision of the Labour Party Annual Conference not to grant affiliation to the Communist Party this Conference urges the Executive Committee of the Labour Party to again consider the application of the Communist Party, should that party make application, believing that the question is one for negotiation in view of the conflict between the constitution and policy of the Labour Party and that of the Communist Party'.

25 1924 Report, p.8.

26 Ibid., p.30.

27 Scottish Executive Committee, Minutes, January 7 1924, February 4, 1924.

28 Ibid., 10 March, 1924.

But while there were explicit pressures locally and at Scottish Conference for more representation by Communists in the Labour Party, the Scottish Executive took a stronger anti-Communist line. Despite the party conference decision, calling for negotiations with the Communist Party, only four of the Executive voted to protest against the national decision to exclude Communists from Labour candidatures, calling it 'premature and narrow',⁽²⁹⁾.

Nowhere was the split on the left more clearly highlighted than in the 1924 Kelvingrove by-election, the one Scottish election during the 1924 Labour Government and a defeat for the Labour Party. The candidature of Aitken Ferguson who had unsuccessfully stood in the 1923 general election was hotly disputed afterwards. He was a member of the Communist Party, although nominated by the Boilermakers Society. When the by-election was announced both Patrick Dollan and Rosslyn Mitchell were mentioned as possible candidates⁽³⁰⁾. Dollan was in fact nominated by the Independent Labour Party but stood down ostensibly 'in the interests of' the unity of the party,⁽³¹⁾. The real explanation was that under no circumstances would the Kelvingrove Labour Party accept an alternative candidate to Ferguson. Glasgow Trades and Labour Council wanted originally to make the choice⁽³²⁾, on the grounds of emergency and the shortness of time to the election, but were persuaded by Kelvingrove merely to ratify their choice. Their only nominee was Ferguson, and the Glasgow Trades and Labour Council Executive accepted him unanimously. The National Executive, however, refused endorsement⁽³³⁾.

29 Ibid., 15 September, 1924.

30 Glasgow Herald, 8 May, 1924.

31 Ibid., 8 May 1924.

32 Ibid., 8 May, 1924.

33 Ibid., 12 May, 1924.

Aitken Ferguson, said Forward, was not like the Communist Newbold in Motherwell. He was 'a Labour Party candidate fighting for the full Labour programme' who would accept the majority decisions of the Party while endeavouring to win increasing support for his point of view within it⁽³⁴⁾. Tom Johnston felt he had given satisfactory assurances of working with the Labour Party in Parliament⁽³⁵⁾. But Ferguson's campaign scarcely made this clear. As Elliot, the winning Conservative candidate, remarked there was: 'not a single defender of the Labour Government in that campaign. Mr Ferguson attacked it'⁽³⁶⁾.

Labour's splits were hardly offset by the strength of its organisation on the ground. While the advent of a Labour Government did give party membership a boost, it was still pitifully low. Although 66 divisional labour parties, and 150 local Labour branches, were claimed, very few were well organised⁽³⁷⁾. In fact only 17 DLP's and 5 Trades and Labour councils were affiliated to the 1924 conference⁽³⁸⁾. In addition, although an executive report of January 1924 suggested there were 44 womens sections and 13 joint men-women sections active in Scotland⁽³⁹⁾, only 19 of these women's sections were affiliated to the conference⁽⁴⁰⁾. With few exceptions the divisional parties that were properly affiliated to the party were concentrated in the urban areas, but even there constituencies with strong Labour votes

34 Ibid., 16 May 1924.

35 Ibid., 16 May 1924.

36 Ibid., 26 May 1924.

37 Labour Party, Scottish Council, Conference Report, 1924, p.4.

38 Ibid., p.22-23.

39 Scottish Executive Committee, Minutes, 7 January, 1924.

40 1924 Conference Report, p.22-23.

such as Bridgeton were not affiliated. With the miners having their own organisations in the mining areas, strong Labour seats like South Ayr, Hamilton and Bothwell, did not affiliate as divisional labour parties⁽⁴¹⁾.

In an attempt to improve membership and finances, two new financial schemes were introduced involving the sale of membership card books and a collecting card scheme for donations⁽⁴²⁾. However, generally it was admitted that some local Labour parties were not very active except at election times. The need as Labour approached power was undoubtedly for a more intensive, persistent and widespread organisation, with at least one such organisation in every polling district⁽⁴³⁾.

In spite of this, in 1924, the Labour Party in Scotland was to be better prepared for an election. In previous contests it had been the case that far fewer candidatures than originally mooted were mounted. This time the position was the reverse. The Annual Report in March had promised 60 candidates - twelve more than at the previous election - 'given a reasonable interval for preparation'⁽⁴⁴⁾. In fact Labour managed 64 candidates, as opposed to 48 in 1923, and there might have been more. The party was able to field candidates in seven seats for the first time, Aberdeenshire and Kincardineshire East, Banff, Moray and Nairn, Forfar, and Kinross and West Perthshire, Dumfries, and Edinburgh East. With the exception of the last instances all were in rural areas. Candidatures were also considered in other seats -

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid., p.41.

43 Ibid., p.4.

44 Labour Party Scottish Council, Executive Report, March 1924.

- Edinburgh South, Ross and Cromarty⁽⁴⁵⁾, Caithness and Sutherland⁽⁴⁶⁾ and even Orkney and Shetland⁽⁴⁷⁾. But standing in 64 seats, Labour was only absent from seven contests.

The party's preparations began immediately after the General Election of 1923. By February candidates had been readopted in Cathcart, Ayr Burghs, and Stirling and Falkirk, and procedures were underway in Roxburgh, North and South Aberdeen, West Edinburgh, Kelvingrove, Pollok, Central, and Hillhead - eight other seats. Local Labour parties were being organised for the first time in West Stirling, Moray and Nairn, Ross and Cromarty, Banff and Central Aberdeen⁽⁴⁹⁾. As early as March, candidates were placed in Inverness-shire, Hillhead, and Roxburgh and Selkirk. Other seats for candidatures included East Fife, and East and Central Aberdeenshire. Women's sections were also being formed.⁽⁴⁹⁾ And by April, 11 seats altogether which Labour did not hold had selected candidatures (Perth, West Edinburgh, Dumfries East, Aberdeen and Pollok in addition)⁽⁵⁰⁾. By August almost every seat the party was to fight had either selected a candidate or was in the process of doing so⁽⁵¹⁾. Unlike previous elections there was little last minute anxiety over putting candidates in the field.

45 Glasgow Herald, October 8, 1924.

46 Scotsman, October 16, 1924.

47 Ibid., October 23, 1924.

48 Scottish Executive Minutes, February, 1924.

49 Ibid., March 1924.

50 Ibid., April, 1924.

51 Ibid., August, 1924.

The speed of activity was all the more impressive because 1924 was to see Labour's first wholesale intervention in rural Scotland. Throughout 1924 speakers' tours and organisational visits were taking place in the north and southern non-industrial areas of Scotland⁽⁵¹⁾. By September 1924 there were seventy additional ILP branches also (including either the resuscitation or creation of an Argyllshire Federation, a Northern Federation and a Dumfriesshire Federation)⁽⁵²⁾. In the cities, the Glasgow ILP claimed to have organised forty meetings weekly over the summer and to have held 500 open-air meetings in the four months since May Day, 1924⁽⁵³⁾. But despite the impressive efficiency in choosing candidates, the Labour Party was suffering from financial problems which lessened its ability to fight effectively. For example, early in 1924, Roxburgh and Selkirk had been improving its organisation, after their candidate, George Dallas, of the Workers Union had accepted his nomination 'only on condition that there was a very much improved organisation in the constituency'⁽⁵⁴⁾. The members considered appointing a full time organiser through various means of funding such as sales of work and voluntary subscriptions⁽⁵⁵⁾. But eventually they decided on a part-time organiser⁽⁵⁶⁾. But as things deteriorated in 1924, the party found that 'they would have to economise as they would be left without any funds whenever the next election came'⁽⁵⁷⁾.

51 Forward, August 8, September 9, 27, 1924.

52 Ibid., September 13, 1924.

53 Ibid., September 6, 1924.

54 Hawick Labour Party Minutes, February 28, 1924.

55 Ibid., April 24, 1924.

56 Ibid., April 24, 1924.

57 Ibid., July 21, 1924. By October funds were 'very low'. (October 7, 1924).

Financial difficulties explained why Labour's leaders were fearful of the consequences of an election. Patrick Dollan recalls that he, with Arthur Henderson, 'opposed the proposal because we were exhausted financially by the 1922 and 1923 elections and did not see how funds were going to be raised for the 1924 campaign' (58). His forecast was to be proved accurate.

58 P Dollan, *op.cit.*, p.23.

II LIBERAL DIFFICULTIES

While Labour seemed ready the Liberal state of preparedness for the fight was poor. Financially they were still reliant on a small number of large subscriptions and it was recognised that 'it was impossible to expect friends to continue giving donations as a number had been doing during the last few years, and it was necessary therefore for the general subscribers to increase their subscriptions as far as possible'. While there had in 1924 been an increase in amount from subscriptions there was a decrease in numbers of subscribers⁽¹⁾.

In 1924 at least there were few difficulties in Scotland about fusion. In April at a meeting of the special committee of Federation Officebearers and the National Liberal Council under Sir Donald Maclean's chairmanship, the object had been 'to exchange views and consider any adjustments that were practicable in regard to the appointment of officebearers and officials from the National Council to the Federation'⁽²⁾. It was to be agreed that the National Liberal Council name six Vice-Presidents of the Federation, three from the East; and three from the West of Scotland⁽³⁾. The discussion had seen 'a very satisfactory exchange of views', Mclean concluded, and at a meeting in June between the Federation's Eastern Committee and representatives of the East of Scotland National Liberal Council, it was agreed that there was no difference of opinion in the Eastern sections about approval of the fusion proposals. At a local level the competing Liberal associations in Inverness-shire had adjusted their differences, making the East of Scotland 'free from any complications'⁽⁴⁾. Only in Argyllshire in the West had matters yet to be resolved.

1 SLF Eastern Finance Committee, May 13, 1924.

2 SLF Special Committee of Officebearers and National Liberal Council, In SLF Minutes, April 4, 1924.

3 Ibid., April 29, 1924.

4 SLF Executive, April 29, 1924.

Formal fusion was not complete until after the General Election. It was not until then that the formal acts amalgamating the Western Divisional Council of the Scottish National Liberal Council with the Scottish Liberal Federation were passed. That happened in December 1924. But the decision in principle had been made long before and, as Martin, Chairman of Western Division of the Scottish National Liberal Council said, the formal acts have been delayed through the suddenness of the election. The election itself had led to an immediate, if hurried, closing of Liberal ranks, and organisational readjustment had had to be postponed⁽⁵⁾.

The question that exercised Liberals was how to galvanise their local parties and the party in Scotland as a whole. A speaking campaign was considered by the East and West Committees and a limited number of meetings were held as a prelude to a major campaign in September and early October. However when an appeal was sent out to most of the constituencies in Scotland, only twenty two gave any indication of 'arrangements' for local activity. The facts were clear: not all constituencies now had Liberal organisations and only a small minority - less than a third - were in any active shape⁽⁶⁾. Another appeal to those associations 'doing little or nothing in connection with either propaganda or social meetings' met with little response and, by the end of the summer, arrangements for the campaign were still very unsatisfactory. The Eastern Executive heard in September that 'only in one or at the most two cases were local associations really organising their own meetings'⁽⁷⁾. It had been difficult to compile a list of speakers that were acceptable to the associations⁽⁸⁾.

5 Scotsman, December 13, 1924.

6 SLF Executive, 8 July, 1924.

7 Ibid.

8 SLF Eastern Liberal Executive, September 1, 1924.

So what was the effective state of central Liberal organisation? Following the election of 1923, Webster - the Liberal's Scottish Secretary - had suggested further attention should be concentrated on fifty-five constituencies - thirty-two fought in 1923 where the Liberals were unsuccessful and twenty-three with Liberal members, although he felt there were others which had not been contested such as Coatbridge and Airdrie, and Lanark, which he suggested might be assisted⁽⁹⁾. He stated that one or two organisers were needed to work at 'strengthening and reorganising the Liberal associations in certain constituencies', but in January 1924 and subsequently in April it was decided that there could be no increase in staff⁽¹⁰⁾. By June 1924 the objectives had narrowed. It was recognised that: 'the efforts of the Federation so far as they could assist constituencies should be confined to those constituencies that were represented by Liberal members and five or six other constituencies that had candidates or were likely to have candidates. It was thought better to concentrate the limited speaking force available rather than spread it over the whole area'⁽¹¹⁾. Even so the committee found it difficult to supply speakers and had to ask constituencies to organise local orators for the campaign⁽¹²⁾.

9 SLF, Report by Webster, 19 December 1923.

10 SLF Meeting of Officebearers, January 17, 1924. While the National Liberal Council found money to employ the Federation's Eastern Organising Secretary, the discussions with the National Liberals did not lead to any new appointments of organisers. In April Officebearers considered the Federation was 'not in a position to fund any money for this purpose'. (Federation Executive, April 13, 1924). See also Eastern Organising Committee, May 13, 1924 and June 2, 1924.

11 SLF Eastern Organising Committee, June 10, 1924.

12 Ibid., June 26, 1924.

The planned revival campaign which was running into such difficulties was interrupted by the declaration of a general election. Liberals were however not without optimism. On October 7, the Eastern Secretary, MacNicol, reported after a tour of constituencies that 'the state of organisation had certainly improved in recent months',⁽¹³⁾ and the number of candidates seemed satisfactory, although there was a number of constituencies without candidates which it was felt should be contested. The most important of these seemed to be in Aberdeen, Dundee and Roxburgh. It was felt, however, nothing further could be done to organise the constituencies until after the election⁽¹⁴⁾.

A forecast of what was to be the Liberals' fate in the General Election was given by the one by-election in Scotland of the 1924 Parliament, which was disastrous for them. Their candidate Sir John Pratt, a former MP and Government Minister, forfeited his deposit, losing 3,000 votes on the poor performance of 1923, despite a bigger electorate and higher poll. The Glasgow Herald had expected Pratt to increase the Liberal vote although local Liberals had opposed standing and the decision to intervene was made at the instance of headquarters at the last minute⁽¹⁵⁾. The party post-mortem admitted that Liberal votes had gone to the Unionists who would have found it very difficult to win had it not been for the great volume of Liberal support they received. Pratt reached the obvious conclusion that he should not have stood and he was 'quite sure that the one result of the election would be a thorough overhauling of the Liberal machine in Glasgow',⁽¹⁶⁾. The party, of course, was already very conscious of the need to improve local organisations.

13 Ibid., June 26, 1924.

14 Ibid.

15 Glasgow Herald, May 25, 1924.

16 Glasgow Herald, May 26, 1924.

It was the Scottish Liberal Federation's Conference which revealed the Liberal dilemma in its most acute form. There was nothing tangible in policy proposals that the Liberals could offer in contrast to the Conservatives other than a statement of Liberal principles in their most general terms. There was a division of opinion over the recognition of Russia, although a motion opposing the Russian loan was in the end unanimously accepted⁽¹⁷⁾. On housing it was agreed that 'the housing position could not be solved by the repression of individual initiative and enterprise', and Sir George MacCrae accused Wheatley of being 'more concerned with killing private enterprise than providing houses for people'. The Conference did more positively propose that rates should be based on the sale price of land, that land monopolies should be broken, and that more labour and better construction methods were needed in the building trade⁽¹⁸⁾.

With discussion of policy for land and industry, the bankruptcy of Liberalism was revealed. One delegate from Fort William complained that the failure to develop a land policy placed the whole of Liberalism in the Highlands in grave danger. On industry, Councillor Allan from Edinburgh, stressed that co-partnership and profitsharing should be at the top of the Liberal agenda and said that: 'the failure of their leaders to move beyond such principles into detailed programmes for the miner, for the railway workers, continuously lost them votes; they denounced the Russian Treaty, nationalisation and Ramsay MacDonald's wickedness but put nothing constructive in their place'⁽¹⁹⁾.

17 Glasgow Herald, October 11, 1924.

18 Ibid., October 11, 1924.

19 Ibid.

While the Liberals nationally were accused of allowing Labour to govern, in Scotland the Liberals were too near the Conservatives. When the Liberal Party's Scottish federation issued their report in April 1924, their defence of independence was based on the need for a wider range of forces than merely Conservatism to fight against socialism:

An appeal for a combination against the Labour Party was being made in certain quarters and if effected a dangerous situation would arise. The working man and woman, the majority of whom were not socialists, would feel that the hands of every other man and woman were against them. Everyone who was not Labour would be against Labour. There would be no opportunity for disagreement. It was here that the Liberal Party found its true function. It must endeavour to show to the working man and woman that the ideals of the party demanded radical and sweeping improvements in their conditions and to show that the interests of working men were bound up with the welfare of the whole community.(20)

The Liberals believed throughout 1924 that the future lay with a three party system. The Scottish Federation's Annual Report stated that: 'the country will have to face and to adapt itself to the new conditions which had arisen under the three party system. New difficulties would not be overcome by a reversion to the two party system, with the parties divided into Labour against the rest'(21). But even more so than in 1923 the 1924 election saw pacts between Liberals and Unionists. These were, however, last minute arrangements, agreed just as the election was declared.

20 Glasgow Herald, April 10, 1924.

21 Ibid.

III THE CONSERVATIVE TRIUMPH

The Conservative reaction to the advent of the Labour Government was to search for a policy in Scotland. The Unionist agent had as early as June 1923 'deprecated the production of nothing but negative propaganda', with Lady Baxter suggesting that Unionist literature was 'not specifically and sufficiently answering the points made with such confidence by the socialists'⁽¹⁾. In March 1924, the point was made even more forcibly. After one member referred to the 'disadvantage the party suffered through lack of a definite policy', the conclusion was that 'effective work could be done if the party had a good fighting programme with which to approach people'. Consequently the Women's Committee formulated a resolution 'that in view of the uncertainty obtaining as to the date of an election, and the necessity for work and propaganda meantime, the women's sub-committee strongly recommends the executive to impress upon the leaders of the party the absolute necessity for an immediate declaration of policy, social and otherwise'⁽²⁾. To the Propaganda Committee, one of the two committees (the other was the Parliamentary Bills Committee), formed by the Western Council, Blench, the organiser, reported in the same vein that 'in the preparation of literature at present we are handicapped by the lack of a definite distinctive Unionist policy'⁽³⁾. While it welcomed the London Unionist Workers Handbook, the Committee agreed that 'the attention of the Western Divisional Council should be called to the urgent need and wide demand for a declaration of Unionist policy and the desirability of

1 SUA Eastern Executive, June 27, 1923.

2 SUA Women's Committee, March 5, 1924.

3 SUA Western Divisional Council, Propaganda Committee, February 6, 1924.

4 Ibid., March 19, 1924.

representation on the subject to the leaders of the party'⁽⁴⁾. It also requested their Edinburgh Office when leaflets were prepared for general issue in Scotland, proofs should be sent through to Glasgow, so that if necessary, suggestions might be made as to amendments⁽⁵⁾. The Women's Committee was partly assuaged by what it called 'a stirring reply' on positive policy from Captain Blair, the Unionist Whip, and the MP, William Hutchinson. But the Eastern Committee was sufficiently worried about the policy and the appeal of it to form a new committee concerned with organisation and policy⁽⁶⁾.

The Conservatives had tried to find a social policy before. In 1922, they favoured less public expenditure (and less taxation), discussed but had not accepted reforms in labour relations and legislation on picketing, union secret ballots and the political levy (but had accepted in principle co-partnership in industry)⁽⁷⁾. Now in 1924 they moved towards a more precise statement of support for measures of social reform. Much was still negative.. Throughout 1924 the Scottish Conservatives in the West, at least, chose the ground on which they were to fight carefully. In April they protested against the Government's refusal to extend imperial preferences and its abolition of the McKenna duties. Thus they could hold 'the Government responsible for the damage' to home industry and the increase of unemployment which will inevitably result'⁽⁸⁾. But Unionists took no action against the Public Health (Scotland) Amendment Bill or the No. 2 and No. 3 Unemployment Insurance Bill which made some concessions to the unemployed.

5 Ibid.

6 SUA Women's Committee, April 21, 1924.

7 SUA Annual Conference, January 19, 1922.

8 SUA Western Divisional Council, April 30, 1924.

When the Council considered policy recommendations from the Executive Committee it agreed that 'a policy of Empire development be a leading plank in the Unionist programme', since among other things the policy would lessen unemployment and lead to lower food prices⁽⁹⁾.

Their concern for protectionism was a sign they were worried by the industrial rather than simply the trading damage now being inflicted on the country, but it implied that co-operation with the Liberals would be less, rather than more likely in the future. But in social policy matters the Conservatives moved nearer the centre, in that they accepted the urgency of the need to build houses. This was 'the most vital and pressing social problem of the day' they concluded, 'and a Unionist plan for dealing with it adequately is called for'. Thus, they did not mount an all-out opposition against the Labour Government's housing policy, did not oppose the Rent and Mortgage Interest Restriction Bill since 'owing to the great shortage of houses, the continuance of control was unfortunately necessary',⁽¹⁰⁾ and they found it difficult to oppose the Wheatley Bill which primarily encouraged local authority housebuilding. The Parliamentary Bills Committee 'while very doubtful whether the housing scheme will achieve its objects owing to the insufficiency of the provision made for the increase of labour (was) not prepared in view of the great and urgent need for houses to recommend that it be opposed',⁽¹¹⁾.

9 SUA Western Divisional Council, May 3, 1924.

10 Parliamentary Bills Committee, Western Divisional Council May 28, 1924.

11 Ibid., June 19, 1924. A note of caution was however introduced: 'some provision should be made for the supply and control and remuneration of Labour' they argued if there were to be restrictions on employers, and 'every precaution should be taken that our policy is in no way bound to continue the scheme should it be at any time proved to be working unsatisfactorily'.

There were other social policy initiatives. They wanted a 'well considered and actuarially sound scheme' for all-in contributory insurance. On industrial relations, views became more moderate, with a desire for legislation to encourage and facilitate arbitration 'with a statutory provision to ensure delay for a fixed period before a strike or lockout', although they continued to press for legislation to make trade union ballots secret and to encourage contracting in rather than contracting out as the basis of the political levy⁽¹²⁾.

It was a sign of this increased concern with policy that with a new determination, local Unionists demanded to be consulted by their leaders before any drastic change of policy was carried into effect, so that it might have 'received the consideration and approval of the party through its representative organisations'. While this motion referred to the problems of 1923 over the protectionist decision of Baldwin, clearly the emphasis was on social reform. In the 1924 election, two million leaflets were issued in the twenty-four constituencies in the west alone and while one women's committee member was to complain that seats were lost because 'a great deal of confusion existed as to the meaning of socialism and social reform', the Unionists were at least attempting a positive approach.

12 SUA Propaganda Committee, June 18, 1924.

13 SUA Western Divisional Council, May 3, 1924.

14 Ibid., June 4, 1924.

15 SUA Western Divisional Council, Propaganda Committee, November 5, 1924.

Overall tactics and strategy were also the focus of concern. When the Glasgow Association met Unionist candidates two months after the election of 1923, discussion of pacts gave way to discussions of policy. The Duke of Atholl, who favoured Conservative candidatures in every seat next time was concerned that: 'The Labour Party were getting a good deal of the moderate support at present owing to the seeming mildness of their programme, but with the withdrawal of the restraining hand of the Liberal Party they would show themselves in a different light'⁽¹⁶⁾. Elliot concluded that their housing programme meant 'enormous expense and that the present Labour leaders were not the real leaders but merely in for propaganda purposes'⁽¹⁷⁾. But Hutchinson recognised that the fight against Labour had to be a tactical one. With the Labour policy now directed, he believed, to capturing the moderate vote: 'the time had not yet arrived for evicting the Labour Government. This must only be done on account of some piece of legislation which was likely to have little support in the country. Otherwise the result would be to give them an effective election slogan'⁽¹⁸⁾.

Propaganda activity became an obsession with the Conservatives during the period of Labour Government in 1924. The Propaganda Committee, set up by the Western Divisional Council, held between mid-January and the end of February, 39 outdoor and 33 indoor meetings and engaged four full-time speakers. The organiser reported 'an awakening of interest' since the election. More money came in to help (with £1222 raised in eight months to March

16 SUA Glasgow Unionist Association. Meeting with Unionist candidates, February 28, 1924.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

compared with £402 for previous year) and a large number of people, who previously had not assisted financially, began doing so⁽¹⁹⁾. A new woman speaker was hired. Newspaper columns were used for 'propaganda purposes'; University Labour propaganda was counteracted;⁽²⁰⁾ and canvassing classes held. By May, 174 meetings had been held since January with 'still a big demand from the constituencies for speakers',⁽²¹⁾. By June 'signs of greatly increased activity were greatly in evidence in the West of Scotland',⁽²²⁾.

New propaganda material was considered, and the propaganda committee discussed the possibility of 'a unionist newspaper for Scotland',⁽²³⁾. By June a West of Scotland supplement to the national broadsheet, 'The Man in the Street' and two leaflets 'What the Unionist Party is and what it stands for' and 'Socialism means less wages for the workers', were produced⁽²⁴⁾. Orders for the supplement were disappointing - only 5500 rather than the projected 10,000⁽²⁵⁾. Eventually 8600 copies were distributed. The Committee pressed on to issue another leaflet 'The Socialist Government and Railway Nationalisation', added a fifth speaker to its staff and organised 183 open-air meetings over the summer. The second issue of the West of Scotland supplement found 9250 orders⁽²⁶⁾.

19 SUA Western Divisional Council March 5, 1924.

20 SUA Western Divisional Council, Women's Committee, March 5, 1924. Propaganda Committee, March 19, 1924.

21 SUA Western Divisional Council, May 7, 1924.

22 Ibid., June 4, 1924.

23 Ibid., Propaganda Committee, May 7, 1924.

24 Ibid., June 18, 1924.

25 Ibid., July 2, 1924.

26 Ibid., October 8, 1924.

Conservatism could congratulate itself on its quadrupling of its majority in the Kelvingrove by-election. With their 4321 majority came a Liberal lost deposit. While Walter Elliot, the Conservative candidate, had demanded first and foremost 'a vote against communism', he had argued in favour of a reforming conservatism or 'progressive unionism'. For him the three main issues were the Government's abolition of the McKenna duties, the interruptions to the housebuilding programme (despite the Wheatley proposals) and the failure to implement the unemployment programme to which the Labour Party had been committed⁽²⁷⁾. The result was thus, Elliot said, 'a warning to the Government that they have been found wanting especially in the handling of the unemployment problem'⁽²⁸⁾. However the Conservatives were still not closing their doors to future agreements with the Liberals. When Walter Elliot was asked during the Kelvingrove by-election whether he was in favour of Coalition with the Liberals, his reply was guarded: 'That depends whether the Liberal Party believe the same thing that I do'⁽²⁹⁾.

The Conservative strategy was thus a two-fold one: to pursue a policy which emphasised a positive programme of social reform and at the same time to organise, educate and agitate against the socialist danger. When the Labour Government fell, it was on an issue that allowed the Conservatives to make the fight one against extreme socialism, and this is exactly what they did.

27 Glasgow Herald, May 16, 1924. In a letter to Nancy Astor, from what Elliot called 'in partibus Bolshevism', he complained that Unionist speakers 'had no presence to stand up to the Clydeside Bolshies' (Walter Elliot to Nancy Astor, Nancy Astor Papers File 424. Quoted in E M M Taylor, *The Politics of Walter Elliot 1929-36*, p.30).

28 Ibid., May 26, 1924.

29 Ibid., May 17, 1924.

Election organisation was probably its best ever. The Women's Committee had recommended at Labour meetings there should 'be a Unionist present to ask questions and challenge statements made',⁽³⁰⁾. Where Unionists were speaking, supporters 'should be ready to ask helpful questions arranged beforehand with the speaker'. In their election report it noted these means had been 'carried out during the election'. 103 meetings were addressed by the men and 72 by women during the election, and 2 million leaflets issued in 24 constituencies in the West together with London and Edinburgh leaflets⁽³¹⁾.

The Unionists did not, however, have a full slate of candidates. Early in 1924 they had appeared to be determined to place candidates in the field, irrespective of potential splits in the anti-socialist vote. When the possibility of increased co-operation with the Liberals had been discussed after the 1923 election, the Chairman of the Glasgow Association said: 'it had been found impossible to get the Liberals to come to terms. It remained to be seen whether the result of the General Election would make them more amenable in future',⁽³²⁾. When the Duke of Atholl, the Scottish Chairman, spoke to the General Committee of the Glasgow Unionists two months later, he spoke for the party's policy through Scotland when he said:

Unless in very exceptional circumstances, a Unionist candidate should be put forward in every constituency instead of Unionists giving their support to the Liberal candidate. Constituencies were assured of every possible support from headquarters in this connection.⁽³³⁾

30 SUA Western Divisional Council, Women's Committee, October 8, 1924.

31 Ibid., November 5, 1924.

32 SUA Glasgow Unionist Association, General Committee, December 24, 1923.

33 Ibid., February 28, 1924. 330

Even so there was a slowness to adopt candidates which allowed in fact electoral arrangements with the Liberals to be concluded with the minimum of difficulty. In June 1924 the party discussed but reached no agreement on how many of Glasgow's constituencies would be fought⁽³⁴⁾. Only in September - a month before the election - were candidates chosen in Kilmarnock, Lanark, Galloway, Clackmannan and East Stirling, three of which the Conservatives were to win.⁽³⁵⁾ Candidates who had been adopted in Ayr and Clackmannan and East Stirling were to withdraw just before the election was declared and as late as the first week of October - only days before the election was declared - there were no candidates in Bothwell, Hamilton, Rutherglen, West Renfrew, Greenock, Falkirk, Partick, and St Rollox, a list which included two seats, (Partick and West Renfrew) which, the Conservatives were to gain⁽³⁶⁾.

The election was seen as a contest against Labour and required an anti-socialist crusade. Unionist slogans, urging people to turn out, included 'better risk a shower of rain than a reign of terror!', and 'Under which Flag - the Union Jack or the Red Flag',⁽³⁷⁾. Liberal pamphlets included one called 'We don't want socialism'. Thus, Labour felt itself faced by the combined might of the enemy. For Stewart, the ILP's Glasgow organiser, the defeat of the Labour government would be 'the beginning of a Liberal and

34 Western Divisional Council, June 4, 1924.

35 Ibid., December 3, 1924, June 4, 1924.

36 Ibid., October 8, 1924.

37 Glasgow Herald, October 29, 1924.

Tory Coalition and the linking up of the opponents of Labour in a common party'. He felt that the Liberals seemed a dejected and disappointed party and were prepared 'to desert their free trade and other traditional principles to join with the protectionist and anti-democratic party in an attempt to resist the progress of Labour',⁽³⁸⁾. Wheatley argued likewise that: 'whether nominal or not' there was an alliance or coalition or an understanding between the Liberals and Tories. In Glasgow today Liberals and Tories can only exercise their differences as a luxury when it is safe',⁽³⁹⁾. Rosslyn Mitchell went further: 'they were going to have a coupon election for the second time',⁽⁴⁰⁾.

Both Scotsman and Glasgow Herald were firm advocates of cooperation from the minute a general election was possible. On 10 October the Glasgow Herald argued:

At the last general election there was an adequate reason for the emergence of the tariff issue on which Conservatives and Liberals should oppose each other, and in so doing permit in many cases the victory of socialists on minority votes. On the present occasion the issue is unperplexed by the fiscal or any other burning question. On the broad platform of hostility to socialism what is there to hinder a rational degree of cooperation in those constituencies where the triangular duel has been proven to be an advantage only to the common enemy? It is obvious that no sacrifice of principle is involved nor would any permanent agreement be implied by a series of understandings entered into for the purpose of defeating socialist minorities and chastening the megalomania with which its leaders appear to be afflicted.⁽⁴¹⁾

38 Ibid., October 11, 1924.

39 Ibid., October 11, 1924.

40 Ibid., October 16, 1924.

41 Glasgow Herald, October 10, 1924.

The Herald was later to express its satisfaction that 'Scotland's lead in favour of co-operation between Unionists and Liberals to defeat the socialists is being followed in England', and this cooperation showed that the 'issue was whether to proceed under the Flag of Unionists and constitutional progress or under the Red Flag of Revolution' (42).

What then was the nature of Liberal and Conservative co-operation? There can be no doubt that leading Asquithian Liberals who ran the party in Scotland favoured co-operation, although not at any time were the arrangements for co-operation discussed in the formal deliberations of the Scottish Liberal Federation or its organising committees, until after the election. But as the Chairman of the Scottish Liberals, Sir Donald Maclean gave the lead:

The issue would not be the Communist prosecution but whether the country was to be plunged into the Russian morass, and whether they were going to support a party whose object was the destruction of the present social system. (43)

The issue, he said, was socialism against constitutionalism and he hoped that 'the merely party point of view would be subordinated to the great national interest':

There would be many three cornered contests which he supposed could not be avoided. Let there be as few as possible. Once the issue was made clear he had no doubt what the result would be. (44)

For the Glasgow Herald this was the Liberal signal for co-operation - and it was later taken up by Asquith who gave explicit support to co-operation while denying his authorship of the arrangements:

42 Ibid., October 13, 1924.

43 Glasgow Herald, October 10, 1924.

44 Ibid.

Personally I have nothing to do with the arrangements that have been made in this, and in other constituencies for the withdrawal of candidates whether Liberal or Conservative, whose competition with one another might have confused the issue, given to the Socialists a wholly desultory advantage and in some cases, through a minority of the electors, enabled them to capture a seat to which on democratic principles they had no title...Both the old parties in this election have found themselves as they believe confronted with a common danger which without any loss of identity or compromise or principle on one side or other, they are making reciprocal sacrifices to avert.(45)

While Lloyd George would concede only that there was 'complete agreement' with the Conservatives over Russia⁽⁴⁶⁾, Asquith embellished his explicit support for co-operation as the campaign developed: 'They were now reduced to an issue between socialism on the one side and anti-socialism on the other'. In fact in this spell he threw overboard all the efforts that Liberals had made since 1923 to distinguish themselves from Conservatives.

McCallum Scott, who had been the Liberal Member for Bridgeton, was later to join the Labour Party. In a letter to Asquith only a month after the election he complained that Asquith's anti-socialist crusade had reduced the Liberal Party to a negative force in politics and an appendix of conservatism. The election, he suggested, had shown this far too clearly, with the party becoming 'more and more committed to a definitely anti-Labour attitude'. He continued:

Under your leadership at the last election a pact was made with the Conservative Party which reduced the Liberal Party to the position of a spare wheel in the Conservative car. The pact had all the disadvantages of coalition and none of its advantages. It was designed to bear no fruits in policy but merely to snatch a number of

45 Glasgow Herald and Scotsman, 21 October, 1924.

46 Scotsman, 24 October, 1924.

seats from the Labour Party which you described as 'the common foe'...No attempt has been made to apply Liberal principles to the solutions of the new and menacing problems, social, economic and industrial, which are springing up on every side. The Liberal Party has lost the initiative in policy. All you have to offer is a mere blank negative to Labour as the 'common foe' or the hope that an equally sterile opposition to Tory reaction might once more induce the country to turn to the Liberal Party in despair.(47)

But if the Liberals were prepared to enter arrangements without making policy conditions, so too were the Scottish Conservatives. Younger, who had been Chairman of the Unionist Party and was temporarily working from the Unionist headquarters in London, suggested a week before nominations had closed (two days after the election was announced) that he felt Unionists and Liberals would work together in certain constituencies simply for mutual advantage.⁽⁴⁸⁾ Of Scottish Members of Parliament, Horne was the most prominent Unionist advocate of pacts⁽⁴⁹⁾. He said explicitly, that he ventured 'to urge all Unionists in every constituency where no Unionist was standing to support the Liberal Party'⁽⁵⁰⁾. Widely acknowledged as the leader of the Scottish Unionists, Sir John Gilmour was careful to clear any obstacles to the working of electoral arrangements. In particular he advised Conservative national leaders that there should be no mention of 'protection' or 'tariffs' in any Scottish speeches, otherwise the much sought after pact with the Liberals would be in danger⁽⁵¹⁾.

47 Scotsman, 6 December, 1924.

48 Scotsman, October 15, 1924.

49 Glasgow Herald, October 16, 1924.

50 Ibid., October 23, 1924.

What then was the nature of the arrangements reached at such short notice? Birkenhead was to praise Asquith later for encouraging adherence not simply to the letter but the spirit of the pacts and "the example presented to slow-moving England by nimble-witted Scotland"⁽⁵²⁾.

But it is unclear what the 'pact' consisted of, who had drawn it up, and what status it had. Forward implied it was intended to be a secret and local agreement, but the Chairman of the Paisley Unionist Association blurted out the facts that in the West of Scotland 'the Liberals and Tories had come to an agreement for the purpose of destroying the Labour Party'⁽⁵³⁾. Forward claimed it was initially an agreement to save Asquith's seat in Paisley,⁽⁵⁴⁾ and then that it was extended. The Scotsman on 13 October referred to a London meeting which had taken place to discuss 74 constituencies won in 1923 on a minority vote and stated that 'negotiations with a view to a pact...have been proceeding quietly'⁽⁵⁵⁾. On 17 October the Glasgow Herald said that about fifty straight fights against socialists were agreed mostly in constituencies which socialists had captured in 1923 on a minority vote⁽⁵⁶⁾.

51 Gilmour Papers GD/383/20. Amery was one who reassured Gilmour by promising he had 'no intention of using the words 'protection' or 'general tariff' in my speeches in Scotland but naturally I shall develop the need for safeguarding our industries against unfair competition. I do not think your friends need be alarmed'. October 31, 1924.

52 Glasgow Herald, 23 October.

53 Glasgow Herald, 23 October.

54 Forward, 25 October.

55 Scotsman, 13 October.

56 Glasgow Herald, 17 October.

The first public announcement that there was co-operation in particular seats came in fact from Sir Donald Coates, Chairman of the Paisley Unionist Association, on 13 October, when he reported after a meeting with Sir John Gilmour, the Unionist Chief Whip in Scotland, that an agreement had been made in London cover seventy seats in England and fifteen in the West of Scotland. Shaw, the Unionist candidate in Paisley, had also been present and had been asked to withdraw his candidature. They had been also told that if no agreement over Paisley was concluded, then the national pact would fall⁽⁵⁷⁾.

The Glasgow Evening Citizen however reported that the London agreement covered only 13 seats in the West of Scotland.⁽⁵⁸⁾ Lord Glenarthur, the President of the Unionist Association in Glasgow, informed a rally on 24 October that in fifteen divisions of Glasgow, and in all but three West of Scotland constituencies, there would be a straight fight against socialism, and he urged all Unionists to support Liberals where there was no Unionist in the field⁽⁵⁹⁾.

The implication from statements by central office and national leaders was that pacts had been agreed locally: the implication of the statements made by local leaders was that pacts had been made nationally to which they had to respond. However, it is clear that Headquarters were responsible as far as the Unionists were concerned. In Paisley Sir Donald Coates stated his instructions had been received from Sir John Gilmour the Unionist Whip⁽⁶⁰⁾. In

57 Glasgow Herald, October 14, 1924; Scotsman, October 14, Forward, October 17.

58 Glasgow Evening Citizen, October 14, 1924, reported in Forward, October 17, 1924.

59 Glasgow Herald, October 24, 1924.

60 Glasgow Herald, 14 October, 1924.₃₃₇

Banff, Scottish Central Unionist organisation had intimated it could not see its way to support the Tory nominee, Templeton, although they had later to draw back on this instruction after Templeton refused to withdraw⁽⁶¹⁾. In Tradeston, Major Lindsay, the Conservative candidate, stated he had 'instructions from headquarters' and local Unionists were 'unanimous' in their 'condemnation' of the arrangement, while it was found St Rollox Unionist Association 'heartily approves of the action taken by the Unionist party in arranging with the Liberal Party to avoid three cornered contests when possible'⁽⁶²⁾.

In Peebles and Midlothian South where there was a three cornered contest, the Unionist candidate telegraphed Unionist Headquarters to ascertain whether the Scottish Whip supported the continuation of the candidature⁽⁶³⁾. The key Scottish figure appears to have been Sir John Gilmour the Unionist Whip, whose role in what he felt was not an ordinary political contest, was clearing the way for constituencies to have only one anti-socialist candidate⁽⁶⁴⁾. It was a response to the situation at the last election that subsequently he felt that 'while the local Liberals were responsive to reciprocal agreements, the Party Whips proved an obstacle'⁽⁶⁵⁾. Central organisation played an important part in the transfer of the Unionist, McInnes Shaw, from Paisley, to Renfrewshire where he had a clear run with no Liberal. The only Glasgow Liberal ready to

61 Forward, 25 October, 1924.

62 Scotsman, 14 October, 1924.

63 Glasgow Herald, 16 October, 1924.

64 Scotsman, 15 October 1924.

65 Glasgow Herald, 23 October 1924.

be adopted in Hillhead, Major Donaldson, was transferred to East Stirling where he had a clear run also⁽⁶⁶⁾. Tradeston and St Rollox were at the time of the announcement of the election in fact the only Glasgow divisions where there was a Liberal candidate in the field, and in Tradeston the Unionists acceded to Central Office pressure to stand down⁽⁶⁷⁾.

From all this it is clear that the Unionists and Liberal leaders agreed early in October on a pact which covered Paisley and twelve seats which Labour held - almost all of them won on a minority vote in three party contests in 1923⁽⁶⁸⁾.

Subsequently the pact was extended to Partick and West Renfrew, since the Unionist candidates who had withdrawn from Tradeston and Paisley were accommodated in Partick and West Renfrew and given a free run by the Liberals. This definite pact covering fifteen seats was the basis for much wider Unionist and Liberal co-operation.

Paisley was the key seat of the pact. While divisions in the Labour forces had prevented a Labour victory in 1923, the Co-operative Party had withdrawn to allow Rosslyn Mitchell a clear

66 Glasgow Herald, 11 October 1924.

67 Glasgow Herald, 11 October 1924.

68 While no list was ever published, it seems the initial pact extended to the following seats, twelve of which can be stated with certainty: (1) Unionist withdrawals - Paisley, Greenock, Tradeston, Hamilton, St Rollox and Clackmannan and East Stirling; (2) Liberal withdrawals - Kilmarnock, Glasgow Central, Maryhill, North Lanark, Coatbridge and Airdrie, Hillhead and either Cathcart, Renfrew East or Dumbartonshire.

run⁽⁶⁹⁾. It made an anti-socialist arrangement imperative if the right were to hold the seat. While the Paisley local Unionist forces were unhappy about the lack of local consultation, their candidate, McInnes Shaw, agreed to be moved to West Renfrew where he had no Liberal opponent. The Paisley Unionists' President supported Asquith as did the former Provost who was a leading Unionist⁽⁷⁰⁾, and the Labour candidate, Mitchell, conceded that 'practically all the Unionists in the constituency are likely to follow the official lead'⁽⁷¹⁾.

Clearly Glasgow was the main centre for co-operation. In 1923 there had been 10 Liberal-Conservative contests in seats where Labour was standing and in many of these Labour had won on a minority vote. At the 1924 election, only two Liberal candidates stood in Glasgow, in St Rollox and in Tradeston. In St Rollox the Unionist Association found little difficulty in accepting the headquarters viewpoint, that they should support a Liberal. As their report suggested, 'support was freely given' in 'loyal compliance' with the view of the Glasgow Unionist Association. The President successfully moved at the Unionist meeting that 'in view of the political situation the Executive heartily approved of the action taken by the Unionist Party in arranging with the Liberal Party to avoid three cornered contests where possible and urge all members of the association to give their wholehearted support to Mr Johnston, the Liberal candidate'⁽⁷²⁾.

69 The Local Co-operative Defence Committee agreed to withdraw 'while holding to the moral claim to fight Paisley', Glasgow Herald, October 14, 1924.

70 Glasgow Herald, October 29, 1924. Asquith welcomed Unionists on his platform and said that he 'gratefully acknowledged the wholehearted loyalty' of the Unionist candidate to the cause of the pact.

71 Ibid., October 14, 1924.

Tradeston was more difficult to resolve. Here there were both Liberal and Conservative candidates in the field. The Glasgow Unionist Association was later to include in its annual report the view of the Tradeston Unionists that they 'deeply regretted the unfortunate and unavoidable circumstances which deprived us of our candidate'⁽⁷³⁾. In fact when the Unionist candidate first told the association that 'owing to the arrangement' he was unable to stand, there was a revolt in the ranks. Members were 'unanimous' in their 'condemnation' of an agreement about Tradeston that had been reached without consultation and there was consideration of running their candidate as an independent⁽⁷⁴⁾. Only on the day before his formal adoption did the withdrawal take place but Tradeston Unionists did put their organisation at the disposal of the Liberal candidate and the pact was 'loyally observed'.

In the other thirteen constituencies it was for the Liberal Association to offer support to the Conservatives and although there were incipient revolts within the Liberal ranks, none was sufficiently strong to produce alternative nominees.

In Maryhill, Shettleston, Camlachie and Kelvingrove, Liberals accepted they would not fight the present election but resolved at the same time to put up candidates at the next one. Shettleston went further, deciding that their Liberal Association would take no active part in the campaign, but were consoled to think that their candidate of 1923 had been adopted as candidate in Dunfermline Burghs⁽⁷⁶⁾. In Camlachie, although a decision was made to retain their organisation for a future election, Campbell Stephen, the Labour candidate, believed they were working together, talking of a

72 SUA Glasgow Unionist Association, Annual Report, 1925.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.

75 Glasgow Herald, 27 October.

76 Forward, 15 November.

'finite or definite Tory Liberal pact',⁽⁷⁷⁾. In Partick the Liberal Association gave active support to the Unionist and did its utmost to defeat Labour⁽⁷⁸⁾. In Bridgeton the Chairman of the Liberal Party offered 'wholehearted support' to the Unionists and offered the Liberal Association as a working committee for the election agent⁽⁷⁹⁾. In Springburn the Liberal Association urged a Unionist vote⁽⁸⁰⁾, and in Cathcart the Liberal and Unionist parties worked together⁽⁸¹⁾. Govan and Glasgow Central Liberal Associations decided not to contest the seats, both passing the same resolution because 'the socialist communist policy of the Labour Party is a menace to national stability and...damaging to the commercial interests of the city', they would refrain from nominating a candidate. Labour claimed the local Liberal Chairman in Govan had called on all Liberals to vote Tory.

In Glasgow then, co-operation was actually possible in all fifteen of the city's constituencies, and thus on the ground extended far beyond the confines of the original agreement between the parties. In the West of Scotland, the position was similar. First, there were few local difficulties about agreed seats for Liberal withdrawals in West Renfrew, Kilmarnock, North Lanark and Coatbridge; and Conservative withdrawals in Hamilton, Clackmannan and East Stirling and Greenock. Outside Glasgow on the Conservative side, agreement with the Liberals was even simpler. While the Unionists had agreed to put forward a candidate in

77 Scotsman, 8 October.

78 Glasgow Herald, 16 October.

79 Scotsman, 27 October.

80 Glasgow Herald, 14 October.

81 Glasgow Herald, 21 October.

Greenock, the decision was rescinded to give Sir Godfrey Collins a clear run with unofficial rather than official Unionist help⁽⁸²⁾. Equally, in Clackmannan and East Stirling, the Unionist candidate resigned, and the Unionist Association agreed to recommend all Unionists to vote for Major Donaldson, the Hillhead candidate, who had been directed to their seat⁽⁸³⁾.

In the West of Scotland, co-operation extended far beyond the seats mentioned in the 'pact'. In Bothwell, there was a joint selection conference involving Liberals and Unionist Associations⁽⁸⁴⁾. In Rutherglen, the Liberal Council urged local associations to support the opponent of socialism and a letter signed by seventeen prominent local Liberals including the former Liberal MP urged support for the Unionist⁽⁸⁵⁾.

Indeed, the only seat which posed problems in Lanarkshire was Lanark itself, where what was regarded as an unofficial Liberal candidate took to the field at the last minute, and by doing so

82 Scotsman, October 11 and 24, 1924. The Unionist candidate had resigned for health reasons. (Scotsman, October 11, 1924). The Unionist Association was unanimous in its support for the Liberals.

83 Glasgow Herald, October 13, 14 and 18, 1924.

84 Glasgow Herald, October 14, 1924.

85 Ibid., October 25, 1924. Liberal helpers were provided for the Unionist, (Scotsman, October 17) and after the election the Labour candidate claimed the Unionist has 'open support of the Liberals through the contest'. Forward, November 8, 1924.

divided his local association⁽⁸⁶⁾. The Labour Party rightly suggested later that the candidate was 'deserted' by his own party⁽⁸⁷⁾.

On the Liberal side, there were few difficulties about securing Liberal support for Unionist candidates in the agreed constituencies. In West Renfrew, where the Tory, Colonel McInnes Shaw, was brought from Paisley, the Liberal Association agreed to fight a united campaign with the Unionists, and prominent Liberals signed Shaw's nomination papers⁽⁸⁸⁾. In North Lanark while the Liberal Association was not prepared to make a recommendation on voting, they did decide to adhere to the position of non-intervention. In Kilmarnock while the Liberal Association had invited Sir Donald Maclean to stand again, and were initially annoyed by the Unionists' 'decision to place a candidate in the field, local Liberals worked for the Conservative victory'⁽⁸⁹⁾.

But it was Hamilton that the Glasgow Herald applauded as 'a model pact'⁽⁹⁰⁾. There, co-operation was so firmly established that despite the pact's recommendation of a Liberal, the joint Liberal-Unionist selection conference produced a Conservative

86 Scotsman, October 21, 1924.

87 Labour Party Scottish Council Executive Report, 1925, p.3.

88 Scotsman, October 15. The Unionist incumbent who had fought the 1923 election resigned at the beginning of October. (Glasgow Herald, October 13), and while the Liberals Executive had a sub committee with full powers to decide on a strategy, they resolved to support the Unionist. (Glasgow Herald, October 16). Murray, the beaten Labour candidate, later admitted the 'pact worked more effectively than most of us thought it would', (Forward, November 8).

89 Glasgow Herald, October 30, 1924; also October 13, 29, 1924. After his victory McAndrew, the Unionist MP, said that 'this was to some extent a Liberal victory because without the aid of the Liberals they could not have achieved such a great success', Glasgow Herald, October 31, 1924.

90 Glasgow Herald, October 23, 1924.

candidate. Candidate's nomination papers were signed by Liberals and Unionists and the Unionist agent worked from the Liberal Party Committee rooms⁽⁹¹⁾.

In the rest of the West of Scotland, the pattern was similar to that of Lanarkshire and Glasgow, with the extent of Liberal support for a Unionist candidate the only variable. In South Ayrshire⁽⁹²⁾ and Ayr Burghs⁽⁹³⁾, Liberal organisation was so weak that no candidates could be found and while there was no official support for the Unionists, Liberals were informally working for the Unionist candidates. But in Dunbartonshire the Liberals withdrew their candidate 'in view of the desirability of avoiding a three cornered contest at this time', and while they made no official recommendation as an association, local branches did explicitly recommend Unionist support⁽⁹⁴⁾. In Dumbarton Burghs⁽⁹⁵⁾ and in West Stirling⁽⁹⁶⁾ Liberal endorsement of Unionists was complete. In the former there was a joint selection conference and in both the local Liberal Associations recommended Unionist support. In

91 Ibid., October 16, 1924.

92 Scotsman, October 13, 18, 29, 1924.

93 Glasgow Herald, October 17, 1924. Initially the Ayr Burghs Liberals decided by a majority to run a candidature, and after two possible choices refused, they thought better of it.

94 Glasgow Herald, October 15, 1924. One such local branch was the Helensburgh and Garelock Liberal Association, (Glasgow Herald, October 21, 1924).

95 Glasgow Herald, October 13, 17, 1924. In 1918 and 1922 the Unionists had supported a Liberal; in 1923 no agreement had been possible; now in 1924 Dumbarton Burghs had a Unionist challenger.

96 Glasgow Herald, October 14, 1924. The Liberal Association was barely functioning.

Falkirk and Stirling Burghs, the Unionists decided first not to oppose Sir George McRae, and then later, after an interview with him, to urge full support for his candidature⁽⁹⁷⁾. In the West of Scotland therefore arrangements covered twenty-eight constituencies where either Liberal or Conservative withdrew with unofficial or official support from their organisations for the anti-socialist candidate. While the Conservatives were more likely to place their organisations at the disposal of the Liberal candidate, there were of course far more Liberal than Conservative withdrawals in the election. Thus in the west, six Liberals stood as the anti-socialist candidates, only two without the full weight of the Conservative machines behind them, and eighteen Conservatives were in the field, eight without the full endorsement of the local Liberal Association. But whatever the associations chose or chose not to recommend, there was no case where a Liberal association recommended either abstention or support for any other Party than the Conservatives.

Cook has argued that 'the west of Scotland pact certainly did not extend to the rural areas or to Edinburgh...Indeed in parts of Scotland Conservatives extended their attack to Liberals who had been unopposed a year before'⁽⁹⁸⁾. Yet while there were instances of Conservative opposition to Liberals, they were almost wholly confined to seats where no Labour candidate was in the field, or where Labour presence was regarded as negligible, and the pattern in the east, as in the west, favoured an anti-socialist coalition, rather than a full-blooded three party contest.

97 Glasgow Herald, October 13 and 20, 1924. The Unionist organisation in this constituency was at a low ebb.

98 C Cook, Age of Alignment, p. 289.

In six varied East or Northern constituencies Unionists resolved to support the Liberal candidate and in six, Liberals withdrew their candidates or decided not to place a candidate in the field, in two cases offering full support to the Unionists. In almost all cases, the reason was either the fact or threat of Labour intervention. On the Unionist side, full endorsement of the Liberal candidate was forthcoming in Dunfermline, where the former Liberal candidate for Shettleston requested and received Unionist support⁽⁹⁹⁾, Kirkcaldy, where the Unionists unanimously decided to support the Liberal who stood as a 'Liberal and Anti-Socialist candidate',⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ and in Montrose, where the Liberals who had refused to agree to a joint selection conference eventually held a joint conference with the Unionists where Sir Robert Hutchison received Unionist support⁽¹⁰¹⁾.

In other seats, Liberals stood down without giving official support to the Unionists. In Edinburgh's Central constituency⁽¹⁰²⁾ and Kinross and West Perthshire, organisational weakness was compounded by fear of an anti-socialist split. In Kinross and West Perthshire, the Liberal candidate, William Hope, resigned to avoid a three cornered fight, arguing 'socialism was the supreme issue of the election', although there was no formal backing for the Tory, the Duchess of Atholl⁽¹⁰³⁾. Kinross is an interesting

99 Glasgow Herald, October 13 and 27, 1924. In fact local co-operation was so firmly established in some areas of the constituency that the Cowdenbeath Progressive Political Association which supported the Liberal candidate was an amalgamation of Unionists and Liberals.

100 Glasgow Herald, October 15, 1924.

101 Glasgow Herald, October 11, 1924. The Unionist request for a joint candidate had been made after the 1923 election and while the Unionists decided on finding their own candidate (Glasgow Herald, April 14, 1924), they eventually agreed to support Hutchinson.

102 Glasgow Herald, October 13, 1924. The Unionists hoped that 'Liberals and Unionists would unite forces in the fight against socialism', but no official Liberal support was given.

103 Glasgow Herald, October 13, 1924.

case of how organisational problems and the socialist threat conspired to produce Liberal inactivity even in former strongholds. When Hope was chosen as a Liberal candidate he described himself as 'an out and out Liberal' who would campaign against 'the reactionary forces of landlordism',⁽¹⁰⁴⁾. Six months later he found 'very little effort had been made by any of the prominent Liberals in the constituency to place the organisation in such a condition as to enable their candidate to contest the seat with reasonable prospect of success',⁽¹⁰⁵⁾. While the local Liberals sought an alternative and resolved to place a Liberal in the field at the next election, they were powerless to prevent their supporters voting Conservative⁽¹⁰⁶⁾.

It is perhaps surprising that the Unionists found any need to support Liberals in the Highland constituencies but their decision to do so was not simply a reflection of their own poor organisation but also of a socialist threat. This was the explicit reason given by the Ross and Cromarty Unionist Association and a major factor in the decision of the Caithness and Sutherland Association⁽¹⁰⁷⁾. In Inverness the Unionists were unanimous in their continuing support for the sitting Liberal MP, Sir Murdoch Macdonald, who was prominent in arguing for support for Unionists where no Liberal was in the field⁽¹⁰⁸⁾.

104 Glasgow Herald, April 14, 1924.

105 Ibid., October 13, 1924.

106 Ibid., October 16 and 21, 1924. Although the Glasgow Herald reported some well known Liberals and had gone over to the socialists.

107 Scotsman, October 16, Glasgow Herald, October 17, 1924. The Ross and Cromarty Unionist Association pledged the 'undivided force' of the Unionists against a possible socialist candidate.

108 Glasgow Herald, October 17, 1924. Macdonald urged 'all Liberals should in this great national crisis vote for the Unionist candidate where there is no Liberal standing' (Scotsman, October 29, 1924). Forward was to claim that Liberals and Tories in Inverness were in the process of amalgamating.

Liberals withdrew in favour of Unionists in Linlithgow and North Midlothian. In the former the Liberals revoked their decision to find a candidate and, declaring the issue to be 'socialism versus anti-socialism', urged support for the Conservative⁽¹⁰⁹⁾; and in the latter, while the local Liberals had set up a sub-committee to interview candidates, they eventually supported the Conservative⁽¹¹⁰⁾. In other seats the Liberals did not pursue their candidatures without giving full endorsement to the Conservatives. In Aberdeen where the Scottish Liberals' Eastern Committee had sought a contest, the Liberal Association agreed initially to place only one candidate in the two seats of the city, but by the time of nominations, they found no one to stand. Equally in West Aberdeenshire, the Liberals withdrew, despite Labour's decision not to contest⁽¹¹¹⁾. In Moray and Nairn, where the Liberals had wanted Sir Donald Maclean to stand, the Unionist received the endorsement of neighbouring Liberal MPs and of local Liberals who signed his nomination form⁽¹¹²⁾.

- 109 Scotsman, October 10, Glasgow Herald, October 17, 1924. Shinwell was later to argue 'the pact worked well so much so that ardent temperance reformers' associated with the Liberal Party worked and voted for the Tory who was Secretary to the Brewers Association in Scotland'. (Forward, November 15, 1924).
- 110 Scotsman, October 15 and 21, 1924. Labour's candidate claimed 'most of the Liberal vote went against us'. (Forward, November 8, 1924).
- 111 Glasgow Herald, October 14, 17 and 20, 1924. While the Scottish Liberals Eastern Committee decided Aberdeen 'should certainly be contested' only four Liberals voted for standing in both seats at the Aberdeen Liberal Association Executive. They were partly appeased by the fact that the Unionist in North Aberdeen had been a Free Trade Liberal (Scotsman, October 15, 1924).
- 112 Scotsman, October 10, 16, 18 and 29, 1924. For example the Liberal Provost of Elgin argued 'they were safer under the Conservatives than under socialists'.

TABLE 6.1
Anti-Socialist Arrangements in 1924

1924

Liberal with Conservative Support.

Stirling and Falkirk (20 October)
East Stirling (24 October)
St Rollox (16 October)
Paisley (14 October)
Inverness (17 October)
Montrose (11 October)
Dunfermline (27 October)
Ross and Cromarty (S 16 October)

Liberal with Conservative
withdrawal or no candidate

Tradeston (14 October)
Greenock (18 October)
Orkney & Shetland (15 October)

Leith (16 October)
 (30 October)
Caithness and Sutherland
 (23 October)

Conservative with Liberal Support

W. Stirling (14 October)
Rutherglen (13 October)
Shettleston (23 October)
Bridgeton (14 October)

Glasgow Central (14 October)
Govan (16 October) (S 30 October)
Partick (16 October)
Springburn (21 October)
Hamilton (16 October)
Dumbarton Burghs (11,17 October)
West Renfrew (15 October)
West Lothian (17 October)
Linlithgow (21 October)
Bothwell (S 14 October)
Moray and Nairn (S 18 October)
 - Liberal informal support
N. Midlothian (21 October)

Conservative with Liberal withdraw

Kilmarnock (S 30 October)
Dunbartonshire (21 October)
 (Branches for Conservative)
Hillhead (13 October)
East Renfrew (13 October)
Ayr (22 October)
Aberdeen South (20 October)
Aberdeen North (20 October)
Moray and Nairn (16 October)
Cathcart (16 October)
Edinburgh Central (13 October)
Kinross and West Perth (13 October)
South Ayr (13 October S)
Dundee
North Lanark (16 October)
Kelvingrove (13 October)
Maryhill (13 October)

Source: Glasgow Herald, Scotsman. The dates in brackets refer to the announcements of the arrangements during October 1924.

There were thus three types of 'arrangements'. In some seats, the Liberal or Unionist stood down or did not place a candidate in the field, but no official support was given by the other party, and it was usually resolved to keep the organisation on a 'war footing' to find a candidate for a future general election. In others there was informal support either through branches or local officials for the candidate of the other party. But in at least twenty of the fifty seats where there was no Liberal-Conservative contest, official support was given to the candidate by the organisation which had no standard-bearer in the field. Table 6.1 shows how widespread in fact Liberal or Conservative support was for candidates who were not their own.

But in some constituencies, where there was a Liberal incumbent, the Unionists refused to give way - in particular where there was no socialist threat of any substance. Unionists and Liberals found themselves in conflict in Galloway and Dumfries and in Aberdeenshire East although in all cases there was discussion in both camps of standing down and securing one anti-socialist candidate. In Banff the Unionists did place a candidate in the field despite pressure from Unionist headquarters to withdraw in favour of the Liberal, after it was feared a Labour intervention was possible⁽¹¹³⁾. Independently of headquarters, the Unionist Association decided to support Templeton as an Independent Conservative without national endorsement and the Unionist headquarters eventually relented to give him official sanction⁽¹¹⁴⁾. In Edinburgh no anti-socialist pact was possible, with Ford the Conservative member for Edinburgh North arguing that 'while there are many Liberals with whom we would willingly

113 Glasgow Herald, October 14 and 17, 1924.

114 Forward, Octobr 25, 1924.

co-operate', the Edinburgh Liberal MPs were not among them⁽¹¹⁵⁾. It did not prevent the Unionists thinking better of a proposal to oppose Wedgewood Benn in Leith and after his victory Benn was to acknowledge Conservative help, but elsewhere in Edinburgh there was a full Unionist presence⁽¹¹⁶⁾.

In both Midlothian South and Berwick and Haddington, where there was an acknowledged Labour strength, both Unionists and Liberals felt they were the most effective anti-socialist candidates. In the former, Unionist Central Office gave support to a continued Unionist fight⁽¹¹⁷⁾ but in Berwick and Haddington where the Unionists also pressed their case, the Liberals deserted their own candidate in sufficient numbers to allow a Unionist win⁽¹¹⁸⁾.

Only in nineteen of the seventy-one non-University seats in Scotland did Liberal and Conservative oppose each other. In four of these there were no Labour candidates. In other nine an official Party candidate stood for the first time at a general election. In other four Labour's threat could be dismissed as negligible i.e. Argyll, Perth, Roxburgh and Selkirk and Edinburgh West. Indeed, in Roxburgh, Labour had more or less explicitly admitted that by running they offered no threat to the Liberals. Only in Lanark and South Midlothian therefore did Liberals or Conservatives risk losing a seat to the left by standing against the other. In Midlothian Labour did win, in Lanark the Conservative held on.

115 Glasgow Herald, October 16, 1924.

116 Scotsman, October 20, 1924.

117 Scotsman, October 15 and Glasgow Herald, October 20.

118 Glasgow Herald, October 13. Spence the defeated Labour MP, claimed there had been 'a desertion of the Liberal candidate by a section of his party who were drawn to support the Unionist candidate'. He argued that while in 1923 the Liberal had had one hundred motor cars at his disposal in 1924, there were 'less than a dozen'. (Forward, November 8.)

IV THE CAMPAIGN AND RESULTS

Labour did not expect to win outright power in 1924. But they expected to increase their numbers of seats. Patrick Dollan recalls that 'Lord Arnold, an accountant, who had the ear of MacDonald had surveyed all the constituencies and advised...that Labour would return with 250 seats'. But the campaign went strongly against Labour. The manifesto was comparatively mild, emphasising proposals for mining reorganisation, the taxing of land values and a national electricity generating system but not mentioning a capital levy, and concentrating on Labour's success in diplomacy and in building homes⁽¹⁾. Labour's style of campaigning in fact played into the opposition's hands. The general aim was to build the campaign around MacDonald's leadership. His campaign began on 13 October with meetings in Rugby, Crewe and Glasgow, followed on the next day by meetings in Edinburgh and culminating in an evening rally in Newcastle⁽²⁾. He lost the initiative to the Conservatives at the outset.

The Labour leadership suggested and the Party agreed - as Councillor Dollan was to remind MacDonald's critics at the inquest after the election - that 'the Campbell incident...and the general circumstances of the Russian Treaty' should be made the issue⁽³⁾. Ramsay MacDonald was to begin the campaign in Scotland. According to Lord Haldane his message was sound - but insufficiently inspirational to divert the anti-socialist cause from a campaign of 'Red scare' tactics. Writing to his sister on 13 October Haldane was to say:

1 Labour Manifesto, 1924.

2 C Cook, Age of Alignment, p.298-299.

3 1925 Labour Party (Scottish Council) Conference Report, p.32.

Ramsay has made at Glasgow a fine fighting speech. But it has no great note in it like that of Mr Gladstone in 1879. The Liberals and Conservatives have practically united too. HHA may not get in. But no one knows.(4)

Six days later Haldane was sure of the outcome - and of Labour's loss of initiative in the campaign:

We shall be beaten. Ramsay made a bad start at Glasgow in his choice of a broad issue and Asquith pinioned him skilfully next night. How differently Mr Gladstone opened his election campaign in 1879.(5)

But if MacDonald was to allow the Russian issues to dominate the campaign, and thus allow his opponents to equate Bolshevism with socialism in attacking both, Macdonald was to argue that Scotland had 'entered upon a contest of an absolutely unique kind'.

We have fought Liberals and Tories before...and we have lifted up the banner of Labour as against both. But down in the constituencies there are no more Tories, no more Liberals. Yesterday the wolf agreed to lie down with the lamb, and issued a joint programme...from now on in the west of Scotland they fight under the white feather. They have already run away. The Liberal Party has gone under the shelter of the Tory huns in order to prevent it being hopelessly wiped out round about Glasgow.(6)

Despite 'the wild and wet weather' of polling day, the 1924 election saw the highest national poll under the new franchise of 1918. Turnout in Scotland, which was historically lower than in the rest of Britian, went up by 7.2% in contrast with 5.9% in Britain as a whole. Labour candidates increased their votes, with

4 Haldane to his sister, Haldane Papers NLS (10/10/24).

5 Haldane to his sister, Haldane papers NLS (19/10/24).

6 Glasgow Herald, October 15, 1924.

only two exceptions, Peebles South and Montrose, and even in the twelve seats the party lost, its vote rose, in some cases by more than 1,000 such as Berwick and Haddington and East Renfrew. Labour polled just over 40% of the vote, and was the largest party in terms of votes. However it fielded seven more candidates than the Conservatives and its vote per candidate was slightly less. Nevertheless Labour's representation fell to 26, and the Conservative representation rose to 36. Liberals were reduced to eight seats and in three of these there had been no Labour or Conservative opposition.

The importance of the Zinoviev letter should not be underestimated. As Forward remarked: 'in the villages and the county districts we were swept away on the tide of the Zinovieff Red Plotism',⁽⁷⁾. Climie in Kilmarnock spoke of 'money influence, mis-statements, misrepresentation and falsehoods', and Dickson in South Lanark of 'the unreasoning fear of bolshevism rampant...and the lack of political education among a large section of the working class'; Johnston in West Stirlingshire said 'the red plot stunt' could not be exposed in time in the outlying districts. In Camlachie Stephen spoke of the Red Plot as a 'bombshell',⁽⁸⁾.

The election performance of each of the parties is summarised in Tables 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4. Labour's vote share was substantially above that of 1923, and with 41% of the poll in Scotland, the party performed much better than the party in the rest of the country.

7 Forward, November 8, 1924.

8 Ibid.

TABLE 6.2

1924 Election: Scotland/G.B. Share of Votes by Party

	<u>Scotland</u>	<u>Great Britain</u>
Conservative	40.8	46.8
Liberal	16.5	17.8
Labour	41.1	33.3

TABLE 6.3

Average Votes of Parties per contest

Conservative	12,290
Liberal	8,423
Labour	11,066

Source: F W Craig, British Parliamentary Election Results,
as cited above.

TABLE 6.4

Gains and Losses in the 1924 Election

1924

Labour Gain

From Liberals

Edinburgh East
Paisley
Stirling and Falkirk

From Conservatives

Motherwell

Conservative Gains

From Liberals

Edinburgh North
Edinburgh West
Aberdeenshire Central
Aberdeenshire East
Argyll
Banffshire
Dumfriesshire
Fife East
Forfar
Galloway
Perth

From Labour

Maryhill
Partick
Kilmarnock
Berwick and Haddington
Dunbartonshire
Lanark
North Lanark
Linlithgow
N. Midlothian
East Renfrew
West Renfrew
East Stirlingshire

But as the party intervened in less winnable constituencies in the rural areas, the party's average vote remained static. The real difference in 1924 was the concentration of the anti-socialist vote in one party constituency by constituency, and with 40.8% of the vote in Scotland, the Conservatives showed that they were the main beneficiary from this process. Even the average vote for each party reflected the Conservatives' pre-eminence. Liberals could manage only an average of less than 8,500 in the seats they contested, less than in 1923, where the Conservatives improved on their 1923 performance by a third, winning the largest average vote of the three parties. The distribution of new members in Parliament reflected this. While the Conservatives lost only one seat, Motherwell, they gained eleven from the Liberals and twelve from Labour.

Cook has suggested that in 1924 the Conservative victory looked better than it was since in Liberal/Conservative contests, the swing to Conservatism was relatively small, and in Conservative/Labour contests the swing was large only in the middle class areas, while negligible in mining seats. Cook suggests qualifications to this conclusion in his discussion of Scotland and there can be no doubt that here the Liberals crucially affected the whole outcome. Conservatives had either beaten Labour because of Liberal withdrawals or beaten Liberals in either two or three party contests. They seemed to have the best of both worlds, benefiting both from Liberal interventions and withdrawals, and it was to set the tone of Scottish politics for the next fifty years, until the swing to nationalism in February 1974.

Conservative response to the election result was generally enthusiastic. The Central Council Executive believed that the 'magnificent results' were 'greatly due to the large amount of work done in the constituencies prior to the election'⁽⁹⁾. While the

9 SUA Central Council Executive, 3 November 1924.

Glasgow Unionist Association had less cause for rejoicing, the Eastern Division found itself 'successful beyond expectations'⁽¹⁰⁾. The election certainly encouraged the party, which already had fifty full-time organisers, to extend their work. The 1924 report referred to the 'awakening which had taken place in the constituencies after the previous election and the increased efficiency of the organisation generally'⁽¹¹⁾.

As far as the Liberals were concerned, Cook has suggested of the 1924 election results:

The outcome of the crucial 1924 election was the virtual annihilation of the party. After this debacle with the Liberals reduced to a parliamentary rump, the party was never again to be considered as a party of government. This factor underlay Lloyd George's failure in 1929.⁽¹²⁾

The Liberals were victims rather than beneficiaries of the Scottish 'pacts' which appeared to have been successful in concentrating the anti-socialist vote against Labour. Labour candidates such as Shinwell in Linlithgow, Murray in West Renfrew, Spence in Berwick and Haddington, and Clarke in North Midlothian believed that the pact was responsible for their defeat. Shinwell argued that 'the pact worked so well that most ardent temperance reformers formerly associated with the Liberal Party worked and voted for the Tory who was Secretary of the Brewers' Association in Scotland'⁽¹³⁾, and Clarke concluded that 'most of the Liberal vote went against him' and argued that the Liberal-Unionist pact 'worked more effectively

10 SUA Eastern Divisional Council Report, 1925, p.8.

11 SUA Scottish Unionist Association, Annual Report, 1925, p. 5. The Glasgow Unionist Association, however found the 'position...still far from satisfactory'.

12 C Cook, op.cit., p.341.

13 Forward, November 8, 1924.

than most of us though it would'. Even outside the industrial areas, McKay, the beaten candidate in Moray and Nairn, concluded that 'the compact with the official Liberals was effective',⁽¹⁴⁾.

The 'pact' that covered fifteen seats saved only Greenock for the Liberals. It meant that in addition to Glasgow Central, which they held already, the Conservatives won Maryhill, Partick, West Renfrew, North Lanark, and Kilmarnock. They did not win Rutherglen, Coatbridge and Airdrie. Through the wider co-operation they also managed to pull off wins in Stirling and Clackmannan, Linlithgow, North Midlothian, East Renfrew, Berwick and Haddington and Dunbartonshire. In ten of the twelve seats the Conservatives won from Labour, Liberals had stood down to allow a straight fight and the election was a pre-run for 1931 with Conservatism the sole opponent of Labour in seats where Labour could not yet or at all command a majority vote. In only two of twelve gains from Labour was there a three cornered fight, in Berwick and Haddington and Lanark. In the first, agreement with the Liberals had been impossible and in the second, the Liberal candidate made a token intervention. Cook suggests that in those English seats where no Liberal stood votes went from Liberal to Labour as well as to Conservative, but in Scotland, the swing to Conservative was twice as high in seats where Liberals withdrew, 9.2% against 4.6% in the rest of Britain.

Apart from the pact, the second source of the Conservative triumph was a swing from Liberalism, especially in the rural areas. Liberals lost their urban base in Edinburgh (with Leith the nearest to power the Liberals now were in Scotland's capital), and it did look as if the urban middle class were moving further to

14 Ibid.

Conservatism, but they also lost established Liberal strongholds in the North East, the Highlands, the East coast of Scotland and the Borders. In eleven three cornered contests, Liberals were beaten by Conservatives and in nine of these (the exceptions were East Fife and Galloway) Labour interventions were the decisive factor. By winning radical votes that had previously gone to Liberals, Labour squeezed them out. If the Conservatives had not been so generous in standing down in other rural seats, Liberals might have lost more. So weak were they that they also lost all four straight fights with the Conservatives.

CHAPTER 7

THE LABOUR PARTY, 1924-1929

I THE PARTY'S CHANGING CHARACTER

The 1924 election provided Labour with a short term boost in its membership and a stimulus to its organisation. Labour had gained more votes and fought more seats than ever before despite its defeat at the polls. There were, of course, immediate differences of opinion on both the achievement of the Labour Government and the reasons for the electoral setback. At the 1925 Conference all views were reflected. While William Shaw, the Council's Chairman, accepted that unemployment could not be solved under capitalism, he argued that:

The value and amount of legislative work accomplished by the Labour Government stood comparison with that of any other Government with the power of a majority and a long term of office.(1)

Maxton however, was relieved by defeat in the election, and the opportunities it gave for propaganda work for socialism:

The Labour Government could not make capitalism work any more than any other Government. It could not solve the great problems that were facing the nation unless they had a mandate to enable them to put a socialist policy into full operation. If they could not get that mandate their place was not on the Government benches trying to run a machine which they knew they could not run but on the opposition benches propagating their principles that could get a mandate at an early date.(2)

1 Labour Party, Scottish Council, Conference Report, 1925. p.27.

2 Maxton's views were to be expressed in a regular column in New Leader.

Perhaps Dollan summarised the main view of the party, he wrote more than six months after the election:

There was no socialist revolution in Britain in 1924 because the conditions for revolution were not opportune and because there were too few socialists. There is much to do before we have educated a majority into accepting principles but the chances of educating that majority are more favourable than ever before.⁽³⁾

The differences which were to beset Labour in the future, were highlighted by the ILP and the Labour Party Scottish Conferences in January and March 1925 respectively. In January the ILP agreed by only 127 votes to 86 to oppose Communist Party affiliation to the Labour Party. While Maxton argued for it, Dollan saw Communists as 'a disruptive influence' and argued Labour had only made headway by distinguishing itself from the Communist Party⁽⁴⁾.

At the Labour Party's Scottish Conference, the issue was not Communist membership, but another one that was to dominate the events of the next few years, Ramsay MacDonald's leadership. After the election Maxton had tried to encourage Lansbury, Henderson, and Wheatley to stand against MacDonald although in the end only five MPs had voted against his unopposed reselection⁽⁵⁾. At the Scottish Conference, Dollan argued that MacDonald had followed party policy in choosing to fight on the Campbell incident and the Russian treaty, and his speech led Maxton to accuse him of 'taking up the position that the leader of the party should be above criticism'; in reply Dollan denied that this was what he felt⁽⁶⁾.

3 Forward, May 2, 1925.

4 Glasgow Herald, January 12, 1925.

5 The debate over MacDonald's 'leadership' is discussed in D Marquand, Ramsay MacDonald, (London, 1975).

6 Labour Party Scottish Conference Report, 1925, p.32-33.

These two issues, attitudes to the extreme left and loyalty to the leadership of Macdonald, were to be the key issues of the next five years in a political context that saw first the rise in militancy that preceded the General Strike, and then the decline in activity in the atmosphere of defeat which followed. The experience of Labour Government had raised broad questions about strategy, ideology, and the role of party factions which were not fully resolved by the time of the 1929 election. But by 1929 they were on their way to being resolved. With the failure of Communist Party moves to infiltrate and control both the trade union movement and the Labour Party in Scotland, the party was more firmly wedded to the right than previously. But really what moved Labour more to the right in Scotland was, first of all, the split in the miners' union, which deprived the left of a traditional bulwark, and, secondly, the defeat of the left wing within the Independent Labour Party in Scotland. The Independent Labour Party in 1929 still dominated the politics of the Scottish left. While on the British stage, Maxton and the ILP were interchangeable terms, in Scotland the leadership, both ideological and organisational, had shifted from the Maxton-Wheatley group to the group around Patrick Dollan who were loyal to Ramsay MacDonald. The history of Labour's development in Scotland from 1924 to 1929 is, more than anything else, the story of the changing policy position of the Independent Labour Party.

In this Chapter we will examine first the state of Labour Party organisation; second, the difficulties the party faced over discipline, posed in particular by Communist and Minority Movement activity; third, the impact of the splits within the Miners' Union; and finally the battle for control of the Independent Labour Party in Scotland. Developments in all four areas are intimately related, determining what sort of organisation the Labour Party would be in 1929. It is the argument of the chapter that while the Labour Party per se was very much a shell organisation even in 1929, still reliant on the strength of the Independent Labour Party and the trade unions, the character of Scottish Labourism was established. In left-wing politics Scotland would never again lead the rest of Britain.

The years from 1924 to 1929 confirmed the pattern set immediately after the war: far from being a mass membership organisation, the Labour Party in Scotland was a skeletal force, weak in membership and organisation. While leading England in Parliamentary representation, Scotland lagged dismally in individual membership figures. As Arthur Henderson told the Scottish Conference of the Labour Party in 1926, the Labour Party could be said to be not doing well in Scotland, since its membership fell so far below its voting strength⁽⁷⁾.

Membership figures for the whole country were comprehensively compiled for the first time only in 1928. They suggested an individual membership figure of 300,000 for Britain⁽⁸⁾, only one in every thirty of whom was in Scotland. When Herbert Morrison addressed the 1929 Labour Party Conference immediately prior to the general election, he reported that Scotland lagged behind other areas of Britain, with only 11,099 members, an average of only one hundred and fifty per constituency. He said that he 'did not want to attack Scotland because all over the individual membership was bad', but it appeared that 'while England and Wales were not doing their bit, Scotland was even more backward'⁽⁹⁾.

Throughout the period there were attempts made to improve organisation. At the 1926 conference a Committee was set up to improve organisation with the particular aim of 'strengthening of individual membership and local ward committees'. Its proposer, from the National Union of Clerks, believed that: 'there were thousands of persons not yet prepared to join any of the socialist societies who would be willing to join the Labour Party as members'⁽¹⁰⁾. In its report the Committee had urged all local

7 Labour Party Scottish Conference Report, 1926, p.35.

8 Labour Party Scottish Conference Report, 1929, p.38.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., Report, 1926, p.38.

parties to campaign for more members and to improve their contact with Scottish and National Headquarters. Leaflets urging house-to-house collections from non-members were also issued by the Scottish Executive Committee in the hope of raising additional finance⁽¹¹⁾.

The Scottish Executive was at its most vigorous in pursuing its long-standing request for representation on the National Executive Committee, as of right, Wake's reply as National Agent as usual rejected its request and asked it bluntly to put its own house in order:

What is really required in Scotland is a wider development of our individual membership so that the strength of our constituency organisations may approximate more to our voting strength in the divisions. The constituency parties should be engaged by the Scottish Council to send their full representation to the annual conference, and if this were done, there would be no need for special representation through the Scottish Executive⁽¹²⁾.

In 1927 after a visit to Scotland, Ramsay MacDonald was so worried about the state of the Scottish Party that he had urged a meeting between the ILP and the National Executive Committee arguing that the state of organisation in Scotland in preparation for the election required special and immediate attention⁽¹³⁾.

11 Ibid., Report, 1927, p.6-7.

12 Labour Party, Report on request by Scottish Executive for Additional Representation, Scottish Executive Papers, June 20, 1927.

13 Labour Party, Meeting of Scottish Executive and National Executive, Scottish Executive Papers, December 12, 1927.

The problem had not been resolved by the time of the 1929 election. In introducing in 1930 a new plan, urging more individual membership and affiliations to the party, the Scottish Executive spokesman argued that 'for once he wanted Scotland to follow the lead of England where there were some small towns who had individual membership of over 3,000'⁽¹⁴⁾. At this time new collection schemes were being devised which contemplated the payment of a commission or salary to reliable collectors since voluntary collections seem a failure⁽¹⁵⁾. Labour's National Agent, J S Middleton, could speak at the 1931 Conference of a vast membership 'lying latent in the large Labour votes', but one delegate introduced a note of scepticism by pointing out that a very large majority of the existing members were also inactive⁽¹⁶⁾.

Scottish Labour was also slow in organising women's sections and the women's vote. It was claimed in 1925 that in that year alone fifty new women's sections had been formed and at this rate it was thought possible there would be scarcely any division without such sections by 1926⁽¹⁷⁾. Yet in 1931 the Scottish women's organiser concluded that 'as a rule progress in women's organisation depends on the general state of the party machine in a constituency and in certain constituencies any advance in women's organisations will have to wait on improved general organisations'⁽¹⁸⁾. Henderson was right in 1926 to suggest that, in this area too, Scotland lagged behind England and Wales and that although 'there had been a recent improvement...much remained to be done'⁽¹⁹⁾.

14 Labour Party, Scottish Conference Report, 1930.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid., Report, 1931.

17 Ibid., Report, 1925.

18 Ibid., Report, 1931.

19 Ibid., Report, 1926, p.35.

There were of course women's conferences. One in 1925 had attracted up to 300 delegates for one of its sessions and had dealt with questions from pensions to education and co-operation⁽²⁰⁾. In Glasgow the ILP's Women's Advisory Council had organised a conference on the question of food prices, with a motion passed to 'organise boycotts' against buying commodities which were overpriced. Further conferences were planned on health, child welfare, housing, and widows' and mothers pensions. There was even a plan for backstreet meetings with women in afternoons and evenings⁽²¹⁾. At the annual Women's Conference in 1928 over three hundred attended the afternoon session and in the same year a series of local conferences and day schools were held round the country⁽²²⁾. When the Scottish Executive asked for women delegates to attend the National Conference of Labour Women and proceeded to ask for full voting representation on the Standing Joint Committee, the Women's Annual Conference, and the National Conference, they were told by the National Women's Organiser, Marion Phillips that 'at the present time taking the number of women organised in Scotland in comparison with any other of the nine divisions in the country, Scotland is not entitled to special representation'⁽²³⁾.

Table 7.1 makes it clear how few women's sections were actually affiliated to the Scottish Council.

20 Forward, March 14, 1925.

21 Ibid., May 9, 1925.

22 Ibid., March 12, 1928.

23 Labour Party Report on Request by Scottish Executive Council for Additional Representation, June 20, 1927.

TABLE 7.1

Labour Party : Affiliation of Women's Sections

<u>Women's Sections Affiliated</u>		
1927	13	(a)
1929	23	(b)
1930	23	(c)
1931	26	(d)

Source :

- a) Scottish Executive Report, 1927, p.34.
- b) Executive Report, 1929, p.23
- c) Executive Report, 1930, p.25
- d) Executive Report, 1931, p.26.

Despite the activities of the Independent Labour Party and the conscious decision to place more candidates in the field in 1924, Labour also was still poorly organised in Scotland's rural areas. This formed part of Arthur Henderson's criticism at the 1926 Conference. However it was still left to the Independent Labour Party to make whatever headway could be achieved in the countryside. At their 1925 Conference the ILP made a special appeal for £500 for rural propaganda. Stewart noted there was a Northern Federation, an Argyllshire Federation, and a grouping of ILP branches in Inverness-shire and Ross-shire, but he diagnosed the barrier to progress as a problem of policy:

They were all agreed that the Highland land should not be used for sport but when it comes to the question as to how the land should be used, they were at variance. Some favoured crofts and small holdings and afforestation. Others advocated sheep farming and cattle raising, while others maintained that the one and only thing to be done was to nationalise the land.(25)

At the 1926 Conference the Oban branch of the ILP proposed its scheme for local control of nationalised land and complained that Labour was losing the initiative to Liberals and Lloyd George in land policy. Unless something was done there would be 'a distinct reaction towards Liberalism in the rural areas of Scotland' (26). Land policy exercised even Ramsay MacDonald who wrote in Forward of the importance of securing a policy, but the difficulty of providing answers to questions raised about what that policy should be (27).

25 Forward, January 1, 1925.

26 Forward, January 16, 1926.

27 Ibid., January 9, 1926.

In March 1927 the Scottish Executive did agree on the need for an agricultural campaign and formed a committee to supervise its organisation. It ran into financial problems, though a number of meetings were held which were judged to have been 'on the whole successful',⁽²⁸⁾. It was the Labour Party's most ambitious entry into the rural areas around a new agricultural policy pamphlet. An agricultural campaign launched by the National Executive was planned in two stages: persuading rural constituencies first to achieve 'the widest possible distribution' of literature prior to a second stage, eight local conferences in Perth, Galashiels, Haddington, Aberdeen, Elgin, Kilmarnock, Dumfries, and Lanark, all held between June and August 1927, with prominent national figures as main speakers⁽²⁹⁾.

Almost immediately however the National Agent and the ILP's Scottish Council were asking the Scottish Executive to co-operate in further action, in organising work in rural constituencies, after MacDonald had singled out rural areas for 'special and immediate attention',⁽³⁰⁾. Consequently, a consultative committee of the ILP and the Labour Party did meet but was hampered by the shortage of funds.

The Labour Party's national agent had urged more attention to organising rural seats and with the assistance of Joseph Duncan the

28 Labour Party, Scottish Executive, March 14, 1927.

29 Letter from Ben Shaw, Scottish Secretary to Constituency Parties, 22 April, 1927, contained in Minutes of Roxburgh and Selkirk DLP, April 24, 1927.

30 Ibid., December 12, 1927.

Scottish Executive tried to prepare a scheme for the 1929 election in rural constituencies. A rural conference was held in June but as the Executive reported, 'the outcome has not been quite what would be desired, largely for lack of volunteers in the country districts',⁽³¹⁾. In 1929 the rural organisation was still almost universally poor. The Executive report spoke of 'an almost total lack of such organisation as we have in industrial districts, the impossibility of raising sufficient money locally as well as of securing men and women of sufficient independence to take office', with 'local propagandists conspicuous by their absences yet'. Consideration of expense and time made it impractical for industrial districts to make good these rural deficiencies and 'the ideal of one great national fund' to finance propaganda and candidates was considered 'remote'.⁽³²⁾

A measure of how big were the problems of organising rural areas can be seen from the experience of the Roxburgh and Selkirk constituency from the mid twenties onwards. While it contained three large centres of population - Galashiels, Hawick and Selkirk - as well as a number of small towns, the Labour candidate in 1924, Dallas, argued that 'there are so many places and the area is so scattered that unless there is someone all the time trying to link up and co-ordinate the work of the party there is no possible chance of making progress',⁽³³⁾. Nowhere did the party try to

31 Labour Party, Scottish Council, Executive Report, 1930, p.8.

32 1930 Conference Report, p.2-4.

33 Roxburgh and Selkirk, DLP, November 14, 1926.

organise itself in greater detail and with more enthusiasm. At their Annual General Meeting in 1926, the party's delegates heard that membership ran at 1250, with 700 men and 550 women, and that in addition twenty-six trade union branches, representing 926 members, were affiliated⁽³⁴⁾. While Galashiels boasted 500 members and Hawick and Selkirk 300 members, Jedburgh, Melrose, Newton, and Newcastleton claimed 50 members each. The party set on making itself a most modern party organisation. They planned to build their own hall, owned their own motor car, and for a time hired a part-time, then full-time organiser. Their constituency scheme of organisation made 'each local Labour Party responsible for regular distribution of literature in adjacent villages'; they drew up a 'census' of party sympathisers and what they might do to help; and locally they attempted to base their organisation on streets⁽³⁵⁾.

But that was insufficient for any significant progress to be made. Their experience with the first full time organiser, J M Airlie - a former Labour candidate - was an unhappy one and the party, which terminated the contract for financial reasons⁽³⁶⁾, and the organiser parted on less than amicable terms, with Airlie saying 'I have felt uncomfortable all the time I have occupied the position'⁽³⁷⁾. And without full-time assistance, the adopted candidate George Dallas, a sponsored candidate from the Workers' Union, found the going tough.

34 Ibid., March 27, 1926.

35 Ibid., March 27, 1926; May 4, 1927.

36 Roxburgh and Selkirk DLP, Minutes, November, 23, 1925.

37 Letter dated December 24, 1925 to CLP Roxburgh and Selkirk CLP Minutes, December 20, 1925. The constituency President complained that he was 'not satisfied at what was being accomplished...not getting value for their money and what they wanted was something tangible done in the way of organising. It was all very well to say the results of meetings could not be seen at once but he contended that instead of things improving...at present there was no local labour party branch in Jedburgh or Kelso'. (DLP July 19, 1925.)

In May 1927 he resigned when four of the branches refused to subscribe to the appointment of a new full-time agent: 'I do not think the divisional party are doing justice to the party nor to the candidate in continuing the very inefficient methods of organising',⁽³⁸⁾.

With their own newspaper, The Borders Observer whose first issue was a 3000 print run made a profit, the party reorganised itself for propaganda purposes⁽³⁹⁾. But following the General Strike, the party membership fell substantially. By December 1927, it was less than 750, not much more than half what it had been in 1924. In all areas the constituency party had lost ground, particularly in towns like Selkirk where its membership was almost non-existent by 1928⁽⁴⁰⁾. By 1929 the party were unable to cover the full £830 they had spent in the election campaign and their new candidate, Robert Gibson, was out of pocket for his efforts⁽⁴¹⁾.

Undoubtedly these rural difficulties of Labour should not be overemphasised, as Joseph Duncan was to remark after the 1929 election. Whereas only six had turned up to a Labour meeting in 1906 in Moray and Nairn, the party now had more than 6000 votes: 'In 1906 we had eight branches of the ILP between Inverness and Edinburgh, North of Aberdeen there was a solitary outpost in Inverness held by seven of the faithful, and this year all the constituencies were fought by Labour candidates financed by the parties in the constituencies',⁽⁴²⁾.

38 Roxburgh and Selkirk DLP, Minutes, May 1, 1927.

39 Ibid., November 14, 1926.

40 Ibid., December 3, 1927.

41 Ibid., October 13, 1929 and December 8, 1929. Things got worse. By 1931 the party's AGM recorded another 'fall in membership which had reached a very low mark so low that some branches have disaffiliated themselves from the CLP', Minutes, December 31, 1931.

42 Forward, July 13, 1929.

However most candidates in rural areas were in fact brought from the central belt with considerable difficulties⁽⁴³⁾, and 'in many...outlying divisions there is hardly any propaganda between elections and little organisation in connection with the Register'⁽⁴⁴⁾.

Weak amongst women and weak in rural areas, the party was also weak in industrial areas. With not much more than 10,000 members throughout the twenties the Labour Party in Scotland remained a skeleton organisation. Shaw of the Glasgow Trades Council told the 1930 Scottish Conference in Glasgow that 'their past methods had failed' to reach thousands of people in Scotland who, he believed, were prepared to support the party financially⁽⁴⁵⁾. In fact there were never more than half, and normally less than a third, of constituencies affiliated to the Labour Party in Scotland as divisional Labour Parties as Table 7.2 shows. While Scottish organisers claimed there were divisional Labour Parties in almost every constituency from the early nineteen twenties onwards, they were obviously little more than shadow organisations, which masked in some cases control by trade unions or the ILP, and in others the absence of any activities between election times. When at the 1930 Conference a motion urged increased affiliation to the party from the branches and constituencies, the Executive spokesman had to report that while in some cases non-affiliation might be due to apathy, in others it was due to 'antagonism to the individuals

43 Labour Party Scottish Conference, Executive Report, 1931, p.6.

44 Ibid., p.4.

45 Labour Party Scottish Conference Report, 1930, p.

responsible for the local organisation',⁽⁴⁶⁾. By this he seemed to mean that local union branches could be squeezed out of representation on divisional parties and abstain from local activity in some resentment.

It was Arthur Woodburn who summed up the paradox of the official Labour Party in Scotland. When he succeeded to the job of Scottish Secretary in 1932 - 14 years after the war, he found:

There was practically no Labour Party in Scotland. The Labour Party was largely a federated body and the real drive was in the Independent Labour Party.⁽⁴⁷⁾

With the disaffiliation of the Independent Labour Party, the problems were then 'immense'; 'My job was practically to build from scratch',⁽⁴⁸⁾.

46 Labour Party, Scottish Conference, Report, 1930, p.39

47 A Woodburn, Unpublished Autobiography in Woodburn Papers, p.66.

48 Ibid., p.68.

TABLE 7.2

Scottish Constituency Organisation

Labour Parties Affiliated

1927	25 D.L.P. ⁽¹⁾ 6 Trades and Labour Councils (T.L.C.)
1928	24 D.L.P. ⁽²⁾ 3 T.L.C.
1929	25 D.L.P. ⁽³⁾ 1 B.L.P. 3 T.L.C.
1930	27 D.L.P. ⁽⁴⁾ 1 B.L.P. 2 T.L.C.
1931	25 D.L.P. ⁽⁵⁾ 1 B.L.P. 3 T.L.C.

Source: Labour Party Scottish Council.

- 1 p.33-35 Conference Report, 1927
- 2 p.21-26, Conference Report, 1928
- 3 p.21. p.23. Conference Report, 1929
- 4 p.24-25, 26, Conference Report, 1930
- 5 p.24-25, Conference Report, 1931.

II SCOTTISH LABOUR AND COMMUNISM

For most of the time the concern of the central Scottish and British organisations was discipline - not only in relation to the Communist threat, but also to those on the left and right who disagreed with the official party. From the evidence it seems that the Scottish Executive were far less conciliatory than the National Headquarters and often caused the National Party some embarrassment.

For example at a special meeting in 1928 of the Scottish Executive with Henderson, Lansbury, and Wake, representing the National Executive, problems were raised about a number of Scottish candidates. Rose, the Aberdeen North Member of Parliament, was unpopular with the Trades Council in Aberdeen; Johnston, the Dundee MP., faced similar problems with the Trades Council in Dundee. In the Leith constituency, there were difficulties with a left-wing candidate, Bob Wilson, and in Paisley, with a right wing Member of Parliament, Rosslyn Mitchell⁽¹⁾. On top of that were the problems with the seats sponsored by the miners' union in Scotland. The Chairman of the Executive argued that 'if every candidate were allowed to go his own way there would soon be an end to the party', and Councillor Shaw, a former Chairman, who was secretary of Glasgow Trades Council, stated, that 'The National Conference laid down the policy of the party and if the candidates were not to conform to it we would be a mere rabble'. Another member of the Executive, Councillor Waugh, pointed out that if the ILP or other organisations were against the Party's constitution or policy, they too should be disciplined. While Lansbury appeared to be especially lukewarm, the Scottish Executive made the running of the issue of the demand for written pledges of loyalty from candidates⁽²⁾.

1 Labour Party Scottish Executive Meeting, April 14, 1928.

2 Ibid.

The battle over Communist affiliation and infiltration into the Labour Party was the major issue to occupy attention in Scotland in the late twenties; it more than anything prevented proper attention being given either to policy or organisation. As one member of the Executive argued forcibly during one of many inconclusive discussions of the question: 'Time was being wasted in dealing with communist matters at every meeting and in submitting reports of Committees. They ought to spend it on dealing with housing and trade union questions and propaganda'⁽³⁾. However, the Chairman believed that it was 'impossible to escape dealing with communist matters which were forced on them and were part of the duty of administration as laid down by the Scottish constitution and remit made to us by the National Executive'. Another member argued bluntly that 'the party would never be healthy until it had been thoroughly purified by the exclusion of the communist element'⁽⁴⁾.

The Scottish Party were only agents of the National Party in enforcing the constitution. But the problem occupied so much attention first because there was more communist activity (a 1926 survey found around 2000 Communists in Scotland)⁽⁵⁾ and more support within the ranks of official Labour for greater involvement by Communists in the Labour Party, and secondly because the party rules on the matter were capable of more than one interpretation. The 1924 Conference had rejected decisively Communist Party affiliation. It had decided that no member of the Communist Party was eligible for endorsement as a Labour Party candidate or eligible for Labour Party membership. But that decision left

3 Ibid., January 17, 1927.

4 Ibid.

5 S McIntyre, Little Moscows: Communism and Working Class Militancy in Interwar Britain, (Cambridge, 1980), p.28.

unclear the position of Communists who were trade union and trades council delegates from sections of the Labour Movement to constituency or trades council organisations. Both the National Executive and the Scottish Executive sent out circulars throughout 1924 and 1925 explaining their positions on the matter⁽⁶⁾, and the latter expressed its dismay at the remaining strength of Communist influence as a result of these ambiguities. The Scottish Executive wanted in fact to go further than the 1924 Conference decision and proposed to the National Executive that men's and women's sections be given the same status as branches of trade unions in order to reduce their delegates to constituency parties 'because of the swamping of certain local Labour parties by individual section delegations largely of a communistic kind'⁽⁷⁾. But to their regret their recommendation was not accepted by the National Executive Committee⁽⁸⁾.

At least nine divisional Labour Parties and the Edinburgh, Dundee, Glasgow, and Coatbridge Trades Councils, were unhappy with the Executive circulars⁽⁹⁾. During 1925 the major problems that arose were from Trades Councils - Coatbridge and Greenock - and Glasgow whose delegation to the Executive could not guarantee they would not support communist candidates⁽¹⁰⁾.

6 Labour Party Scottish Executive, March 9, 1925.

7 Ibid., April 4, 1925.

8 Ibid., May 11, 1925.

9 Ibid., June 8, 1925.

10 Ibid.

The Scottish Executive had refused to receive a deputation from Greenock 'until satisfactory guarantees had been given that in future no nomination of a member of the Communist party would be accepted by them...and that in all other aspects the constitution and rules would be adhered to',⁽¹¹⁾. When the Trades Council did reply the Executive were dissatisfied with its pledge and referred the matter to the STUC⁽¹²⁾. In the Coatbridge constituency two bodies were in existence: a Coatbridge and Airdrie Trades Council which admitted that 'the Communists had for a considerable time dominated' its proceedings, and an Airdrie Trades and Labour Council⁽¹³⁾. Eventually the Coatbridge Trades Council was recommended for disaffiliation⁽¹⁴⁾. The Scottish Executive seemed to feel that a solution to this sort of problem lay in separating industrial and political activity⁽¹⁵⁾. But from head office, Wake urged 'the importance of trades and labour councils combining both functions which was almost now universal and had succeeded well',⁽¹⁶⁾.

From the 1925 Conference onwards rules were made harsher with respect to Communist involvement although some Scottish Members of Parliament and local parties had become prominent in a campaign to rescind the 1924 decisions and tried to prevent an even harsher line. MPs who supported a circular against the expulsion

11 Ibid., March 6, 1925.

12 Ibid., August 10, 1925.

13 Ibid., May 11, 1925.

14 Ibid., November 23, 1925.

15 Ibid., April 4, 1925, October 12, 1925.

16 Ibid., October 12, 1925.

of Communists, included not only Maxton, Wheatley, Kirkwood, McLean, Stephen, and Buchanan, but also Tom Johnston; and Shinwell, who had lost his seat, was also known to oppose going further than the 1924 decision.

At the 1925 Conference, however, a recommendation that Communist Party members could not be delegates from individual sections of the party, and urging that trade unions refrain from nominating Communists as local or national delegates, was carried. It meant a tighter rein on membership and affiliation from the Scottish Executive. The Glasgow Trades Council protested against this, and three constituencies refused immediately to comply, Bridgeton, Paisley and Coatbridge, and later Gorbals and Springburn. Thus in January 1926 it was recommended that Gorbals, Paisley, Bridgeton and Springburn be disaffiliated and refused credentials for the Annual Conference⁽¹⁷⁾. Others like Maryhill and Paisley objected but were brought into line. After much dispute Glasgow Trades Council by a 'very large majority' decided to comply with the 1925 resolution⁽¹⁸⁾. For its part the National Executive instructed the Scottish Executive to be flexible and to allow Peter Kerrigan to attend as a delegate at the 1926 Scottish Conference as 'temporary expedient to cover an emergency and not an admission of right'⁽¹⁹⁾.

17 Labour Party Scottish Executive, Minutes, January 8, 1926. See also Minutes, November 23, 1925.

18 Ibid., March 22, 1926.

19 Ibid., April 12, 1926. Kerrigan was a well known Communist from Glasgow Trades and Labour Council.

Trouble was widespread after 1925. In the end some constituency parties had to be re-constructed, not all of which had come out explicitly against the 1925 decision and the Scottish Executive circular which attempted to implement it⁽²⁰⁾. Mining constituencies were especially affected and in a state of some disarray. The Bathgate Trades and Labour Council seemed more or less to have 'fallen to pieces', as a result of the communist difficulties⁽²¹⁾. The Falkirk one only agreed to comply with the 1925 decision by 21 votes to 16⁽²²⁾. The Aberdeen Trades Council had Minority Movement members on the Executive and their position required to be clarified by a more definite and conclusive ruling from National Office which came in August 1926⁽²³⁾. When Denny Trades Council proposed to 'substitute a minority committee for a local labour party' this was ruled unconstitutional⁽²⁴⁾.

20 Six constituencies in Glasgow, Bridgeton, Gorbals, Springburn, Kelvingrove, Tradeston and St Rollox, had to be investigated and reconstructed, and Greenock and Paisley Trades Councils faced similar difficulties. In Bridgeton, for example, it was alleged 'an individual section of fifteen men sending ten delegates of a communistic type held the balance of power in the Divisional Labour Party'. Similar situations operated, the Scottish Executive claimed, in Springburn and Gorbals. Kelvingrove was under 'the domination of the communistic element'. (Scottish Executive Committee, Minutes, 1925-1926). But even in Central Aberdeenshire a communist had been run as a candidate.

21 Labour Party Scottish Executive, Minutes, November 8, 1926.

22 Ibid., January 17, 1927.

23 Ibid., August 15, 1927.

24 Ibid., June, 1926.

The most illuminating revelation of the Communist difficulties can be seen from the experience of Glasgow Trades and Labour Council throughout the period. The Trades and Labour Council was reconstituted in 1918 as the central Labour Party for Glasgow with powers to arbitrate and select candidates for local parties in emergencies. Although it was both a political and industrial body, its delegate to the 1924 STUC Congress was to be absolutely accurate when he said the Trades Council were 'practically dominated' by their political work for the Labour Party⁽²⁵⁾.

From the early twenties battle was joined between left and right, with the Council veering towards supporting Communist involvement in the Labour Party. In 1922 it opposed the rule that persons in other organisations could not be delegates to Labour's Annual Conference, and when Communists were specifically excluded, it delayed implementing the rule. When future Labour conferences went further, arguing no Communist was eligible for endorsement as a Labour candidate or to be a Labour member, the Trades Council again delayed implementing the rule and asked the Scottish Council whether an affiliated trade union could nominate Communists. When the Scottish Advisory Council stated that 'the logical application of the ruling' was to exclude Communists from individual sections, the Trades Council claimed the Scottish Executive were 'going outwith their powers'. Finally when the Labour Conference of 1926 decided that no Communist was eligible to hold any Labour Party posts, the Council decided by only 103 votes to 102 to ask for 'further interpretation' in preference to ignoring the rule. However, following the general strike Communist influence declined, and while local Labour Parties in Glasgow were being disaffiliated, the Communist Party lost its influence on the Trades Council and its executive⁽²⁶⁾.

25 Glasgow Herald, April 18, 1924.

26 The history of Glasgow Trades Council in this period is examined by P Liddell, op.cit., pp.33-55.

It was in 1927 that matters in Glasgow came to a head. With a municipal by-election in Kelvingrove, (and the Kelvingrove Labour Party disaffiliated from the Scottish Council), the Trades Council Executive and the local Labour Party Executive met jointly to consider nominations. Aitken Ferguson, as a member of the Communist Party, was eliminated automatically and a railwaymen's union candidate was chosen in preference to an ILP nominee. But on a vote to endorse the candidature a majority voted against. The Trades Council Executive then proceeded on their own to ratify their choice, and a breakaway group urged support for Ferguson, who was then nominated by Kelvingrove Labour Party. The outcome was a Conservative victory, disorder at Trades Council meetings which had to be suspended, a plebiscite of all affiliated organisations, and the reconstitution of the Trades Council, with only loyal organisations who supported the constitutional position sending delegates. This loyalist victory had been foreshadowed by the Council's detachment from its previous support for the Minority Movement. In 1925 it had voted to affiliate to the Movement by a small majority after sending an observer to the Movement's Conference in January. It withdrew from affiliation after the General strike⁽²⁷⁾.

With the passage of the 1927 Trades Disputes Act, the Council found itself forced to separate industrial and political work. New rules passed in November 1928, limited the Trades Council to specifically industrial activities and the new Glasgow Burgh Labour Party, with a common secretariat but meeting on different evenings from the Council, was affiliated to the Scottish and National Labour Party.

27. Ibid.

That problems were not simply ones of Communist infiltration as was illustrated in this period by the experience of the Leith by-election in 1924, occasioned by Wedgewood Benn's defection from the Liberal Party. In a Forward article 'Why I Left the Liberal Party', Benn claimed that 'the final decision was taken when the Liberal Party agreed to take Mr Lloyd George's money ... the party will in effect be his party'. He argued that he favoured public ownership, progressive democracy and industrial democracy and stated that he had applied to join the Fabian Society and was studying the ILP programme⁽²⁸⁾. There was no doubt that powerful Scottish and British voices wanted Benn to be adopted as the Labour candidate, and Arthur Woodburn, then a Leith constituency official, later recalled that the National Executive were annoyed when he was not adopted.

The Labour candidate was in fact Bob Wilson, a left-wing member who had only agreed under pressure to give an undertaking he would be bound by Labour Policy. Dollan considered Leith a certain Labour gain⁽²⁹⁾, and MacDonald was confident⁽³⁰⁾, and just before the by-election Labour had made headway in municipal elections in Leith⁽³¹⁾. In addition the Liberals had found it difficult to secure an acceptable candidate after Benn's defection and his resignation of the seat⁽³²⁾. In the event in a three party contest Labour lost, it was alleged, as a result of Wilson's extremism.

28 Forward, 12 February 1927.

29 Forward, 19 February 1927.

30 Forward, 5 March.

31 Forward, 19 February.

32 Forward 19 February, Forward, 26 February.

In the postmortem Henderson was later critical of Wilson's address and especially his refusal to make use of Benn's offer of assistance. At one point in the election Wilson had seemed to come out in favour of 'confiscation', which, according to Woodburn, caused a 'furore' and a feeling a disastrous blunder had been made⁽³³⁾. One member of the Scottish Executive, Ritchie, summed up its general feelings when he said that Wilson's action had thrown the election away and allowed a revival of the Liberal Party.

The continuing problem of the extreme left was seen after the by-election. The Scottish Executive insisted on a pledge from Wilson, when he was adopted as prospective candidate for the general election, to support Labour policy. It voted by six votes to five in November 1927⁽³⁴⁾ to exact this in writing in a form 'without equivocation or alteration'. It had been felt insufficient for Wilson to give only 'a general acceptance of policy' or mere verbal understandings. The Party's Head Office, while admitting that 'in desperate circumstances a desperate remedy was needed' had pointed out that there was no precedent for asking for such a pledge⁽³⁵⁾.

Woodburn claimed the situation was so delicate that he had persuaded Lansbury and Shepherd and Henderson, the National Executive Officers, at the 1928 Labour conference to accept that if Wilson told Woodburn he would adhere to the programme this would be 'sufficient'. But this agreement was misrepresented at the constituency, and it was claimed that Woodburn had been asked by

33 Ibid., 14 April.

34 SEC, 14 November 1927.

35 SEC Meeting with Henderson, 14 April, 1928.

the Executive to get Bob Wilson to 'give in' ⁽³⁶⁾. In the end Wilson resigned his candidature, refusing to make a written pledge of loyalty, and in the end his nomination as a Scottish Conference delegate was refused ⁽³⁷⁾.

The Scottish Executive did not abandon its desire for 'written pledges' signed by candidates. They demanded a similar pledge to one Wilson had been asked for from the Rev. W D Stewart when he was alleged to be 'reactionary' ⁽³⁸⁾. Rose in North Aberdeen, who refused to give a loyalty undertaking, died in 1928 while he was being replaced.

Thus in 1928 when the Communist Party had adopted its 'new line' rejecting attempts to persuade or infiltrate the Labour Party and championing an independent approach, the first test was in the strife-torn constituency of Aberdeen North where Frank Rose, the Labour member, had been disowned by the local Trades Council which itself had had a considerable Communist element. The breaking point had been minor, Rose's support of the Stage Guild, an acting organisation, when the official actors' union had 'blackened' them. But his opposition to nationalisation and other cardinal policies was well known ⁽³⁹⁾. In October 1925, John Paton stood and then withdrew as a candidate for the seat; later a ballot of individual members on Rose's suitability had been held; and the National Executive

36 A. Woodburn, Unpublished Autobiography.

37 Conference Report, 1929, p.32.

38 Executive Report, 1929, p.7.

39 C Phipps, op.cit., p.148.

Committee had opened negotiations for a reconciliation between Rose and the local party⁽⁴⁰⁾. But as Rose died in 1928 and the Communist Party decided on open war against the Labour Party, many of the problems inside the Council were solved. In the ensuing by-election, the Labour candidate, Wedgewood Benn, won a four cornered contest in which the Communist candidate, Aitken Ferguson, pushed the Liberals from third to fourth place.

At Labour's 1928 Conference the rules on Communist and left-wing participation were again tightened up, with constituency parties urged to ostracise Communists from their platforms and meetings while the Communist Party's new line of hostility to Labour was pursued. In the circumstances the problems before the general election in 1929 in places like Govan were as much personality as political differences, although the concern with left-wing infiltration remained at the centre of the Scottish Party's activities. Throughout the whole of the twenties, it occupied a 'considerable part' of the Executive's time⁽⁴¹⁾ and was said to discourage membership, for the 1931 Report regretted 'many good people... instead of realising their duty and acting boldly...retire into the background and in some cases lapse their membership because of local troubles'.⁽⁴²⁾

40 Ibid., p.150-4.

41 Report, 1928, p.6.

42 Report, 1931, p.5.

III THE TRADE UNION CONNECTION

The trade union involvement with the Labour Party was not what it should have been. There were difficulties for three major reasons. First the recession bit into union funds. Secondly, the trades disputes act and its contracting - in requirement for contributions to political funds after 1927 meant 'a falling off of trade union subscriptions and affiliation fees'⁽¹⁾. The annual income of the Labour Party nationally fell dramatically from £39,000 in 1924 to £25,000 in 1929⁽²⁾. The third problem was the political complexion of some of the unions. Arthur Henderson argued to the Scottish Conference, that 'in preference election funds be raised in the division rather than by reliance on trade union funds'⁽³⁾. But this was, as we have seen not to be a practicable policy, at least so far as Scotland was concerned.

Trade union membership deteriorated substantially between its 'high watermark,' as Joseph Duncan of the Farm Servants called it, in 1924 and 1929. Affiliation to the STUC was one incomplete but useful gauge of actual membership. In 1925, in the only survey that was conducted of the full extent of unionisation in Scotland there were found to be 536,432 members, representing one third of the Scottish workforce. One gauge of the deterioration between then and 1929 was figures for affiliation to the STUC. In 1924 membership stood at 323,687 and in 1925 it was 327,805. By 1929 the figure was 20% lower, at 265,641⁽⁴⁾. Most of the big unions suffered their most severe losses in the early nineteen twenties and Table 7.3 shows how membership remained relatively stable. But the exception was

1 Labour Party Scottish Conference, Executive Report, 1929, p.9.

2 Ibid., Report, 1930, p.10.

3 Ibid., Report, 1926, p.35.

4 Forward, April 27, 1929.

the miners, whose paper membership of 30,000 in 1929 disguised the major splits in the mining community which had by then produced two unions seeking recognition. In 1929 they were not affiliated to the STUC and Dollan argued that the ILP and other trade unions should give the miners special aid to reorganise their forces⁽⁵⁾.

TABLE 7.3

Trade Union Membership 1925 and 1929

000's

	<u>1925</u>	<u>1929</u>
Engineers	19.1	18.6
Woodworkers	15.9	16.2
ETU	1.5	1.5
General Workers	23.2	21.2
Shop Assistants	9.4	10.7
NUDAW	11.4	13.1
Miners	38.6	30.5
General Workers	26.0	27.7
Commercial Motormen	9.0	9.3
Patternmakers (1924)	2.7	2.6
Jute and Flax	13.0	13.0
Typographical	6.0	7.2

Source: E Kebblewhite, op.cit., Appendix One.

5 Ibid.

The problem in Scotland was that few trade unions took an interest in Labour representation, apart from the miners, and even in 1930 trade union affiliation to the Scottish Conference was poor. Few unions paid more than a nominal affiliation fee. The Transport and General Workers Union, the Scottish Mineworkers, the National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers, and the Railwaymen and Railway Clerks were the only unions which paid more than £1 in affiliation fees⁽⁶⁾, and few were keen to sponsor candidates. In the 1929 election, with the exception of the miners there were only three trade union nominees - Mathers (West Edinburgh) from the Railway Clerks Association; Buchanan (Gorbals) from the Patternmakers; Irwin (Montrose) from the Boilermakers. One other candidate had been nominated by the Dyers Society but did not eventually contest the election.

Even when trade unions were involved in sponsorship it was not an unmixed blessing as they demanded full control in the constituencies. As far as trade union rights were concerned, Head Office was sensitive. With regard to the case of Rose in Aberdeen, an Engineering union candidate, Henderson said 'They did not recognise a prescriptive right to the candidature on the part of any organisation, but the AEU, an affiliated organisation, had been responsible in time past for the candidature and had spent much money on it, which entitled them to some consideration'⁽⁷⁾.

In addition many trade union branches simply omitted to affiliate to the party locally. The excuse for non-affiliation to local Labour parties, said the Executive was that 'trade union headquarters are unable to send a share of the political fund to branches for that purpose'⁽⁸⁾. As the Scottish Executive

6 Labour Party Scottish Conference Report, 1930, pp.22-23.

7 SEC, 14 April 1928, Meeting with Lansbury, Henderson, and Wake.

8 Ibid., Report, 1929, p.9.

spokesman was to tell the 1930 Conference:

Trades Councils or DLPs finding branches of a union entitled to be affiliated not being represented on their councils should make representations to the Scottish Executive...until all bodies entitled to be in were actually playing their part the machine would not work as it should.(9)

In Glasgow, despite the concentration of trade union memberships, the position was as serious as in some less well organised areas. As Ben Shaw was to tell the 1925 STUC Conference: 'it was quite true that the trade unions were not taking the interest they should take...when he went to a local Labour Party selection committee he found that the trade unions were outnumbered by co-op representatives',(10).

The miners remained the major trade union pushing the claims of Labour for political representation. And in many ways they operated like a party within a party - claiming full control over constituencies in which they placed their candidates. But the splits within the miners' union - with the breakaway groupings of the Miners' Reform Movement taking control of the union in Scotland for some time - weakened Labour, not least because the party's MPs were leading officials of the old established union, the only union the Labour Party was to recognise. But the background of a deteriorating membership is perhaps the key reason why the miners were never after the twenties to have the power they had during that decade in Labour's circles. Scottish miners, who numbered 140,000 around 1920, had fallen to 90,000 by 1928. Unionised miners were down to as low as 54,000 in 1927⁽¹¹⁾. In these circumstances the miners could hardly be the political force they had been.

9 Ibid., Report, 1930, p.39.

10 STUC Report, 1925, 'Discussion of Political Objects'.

11 Scottish Union of Mineworkers, Executive, June 10, 1927.

Throughout the twenties, the miners insisted on their control over the constituencies in which they were prepared to sponsor candidates. In 1922 they had sponsored winning candidates in ten seats, through contributions both locally and from the Miners' Federation nationally. Even after the decline in membership became severe, they attempted to maintain their representation, at nine members. North Lanark, the tenth seat, had been lost to the Conservatives in 1924 but the Union had supported financially Hugh Murning, in Falkirk and Stirling, who had taken the tenth place. The Scottish quota was thus 'complete',⁽¹²⁾.

The problems occasioned by the by-election in 1926 in Bothwell show how far the miners regarded some Labour seats as their seats, and how hard it was for the Labour Party centrally to assert control. With the death of Robertson, the sitting member, the first decision of the Lanarkshire Miners' Executive was to instruct 'their representative' on the Scottish Executive 'to recommend the adoption of a miners' candidate',⁽¹³⁾. The Lanarkshire Council then selected their own short list, after receiving a letter from the Scottish council stating 'that the miners had an indefeasible claim to contest the seat' and that no opposition was anticipated to their claim⁽¹⁴⁾. After the miners had selected I J McKenna, one of their own members, by an exhaustive balloting system, involving delegates' votes, branch block votes, and financial votes, he was beaten at the constituency selection conference by an ILP nominee, Thomas Dickson. As the miners' executive minuted, they felt betrayed. To them, 'the following facts were established':

12 Lanarkshire County Union, December 1, 1926.

13 Lanarkshire Miners Executive, February 20, 1926.

14 Lanarkshire Miners Union, Council, February 25, 1926.

1. That the Scottish Labour Party had stated that the miners had an indefeasible claim on the seat.
2. That if the miners put forward a candidate they did not anticipate any other nomination.
3. That Mr Thomas Dickson had indicated that he would not stand against a nominee of the miners.

The strength of the miners' claim was one thing: the way Labour gave in to them was another. With the miners - at both the Scottish and British level - demanding an enquiry, the ILP candidate, Dickson, withdrew and the Labour Party's National Executive accepted that 'Bothwell was a miners' seat and (that) the Secretary of the Scottish Labour Party had been authorised to call an adjourned conference...at which the candidature of Mr McKenna should be confirmed'. When McKenna withdrew, Joseph Sullivan was chosen by the miners in preference to the Minority Movement candidate Allan, and after his candidature was confirmed at the selection conference in the constituency, Arthur Henderson came north to say that: 'the miners had a moral right to contest the seat as against the indefeasible right as stated by the Scottish Secretary of the Labour Party'. Despite Henderson's semantics the Labour Party had given in to the miners. Even so it had to face a further demand at both Scottish Executive and Scottish Conference for an enquiry 'into the circumstances connected with the putting forward of an ILP candidate into a seat which had always been contested by the miners' (15).

15 Lanarkshire Miners Executive, February 28, 1926. Also March 2, 1926, March 5, 1926.

If miners always retained their ability to coerce or cajole the Labour Party, much of their political control was in fact lost through the divisions within their own unions. The background to internal disputes of the Lanarkshire, Fife, and Scottish Mineworkers' Union which ended with rival and breakaway unions has been documented elsewhere⁽¹⁶⁾, although the detailed events await a full and comprehensive study. Divisions had started almost as soon as war was ended with the growth of the reform movement, and the constitutional wrangles which led to two unions and a bitter ideological dispute between Communists and Labour. The problem was not however merely a question of trade union politics: most of the ILP's branches were in mining areas, and most of the Scottish miners' MPs were identifiably in the right-wing camp, with James Brown, John Robertson, Hugh Murning, Joseph Sullivan, and most of all William Adamson, and also the miners' union leaders the major targets of the Minority Movement and Communist groups.

While the splits within the miners' union were part of the division between Communists and the Labour Party, which conference decisions were attempting to resolve, it could not so easily be set aside by discipline within the union. The North Lanark nomination conferences exemplified this very clearly and showed how the divisions within the union debilitated the Labour Party in Scotland. Without the support of the miners in Scotland and Britain, the Lanarkshire miners decided in 1926 they would place a candidate in the North Lanark constituency they had lost in 1924⁽¹⁷⁾. After a branch vote and a financial vote (that is with branch contributions being the bases of the decision), William

16 See for example R. P. Arnot, op.cit., pp.161-196 and I Macdougall (ed.), Militant Miners, (Edinburgh, 1901).

17 Lanarkshire County Union, Council, December 1, 1926.

Allan, a Communist Party member, won an outright victory over three Labour Party members for the nomination and his name went forward to the North Lanark Labour Party for consideration. When Allan was ruled out of order on grounds of Communist membership, the selection conference was held back to allow a new miners' nominee but Allan was endorsed again by them⁽¹⁸⁾. Allan was initially refused nomination but again was endorsed by the Union after a further extension of time (from January to June) had been given. The miners argued that as his nomination was that of the Lanarkshire Mineworkers, it should be submitted to the selection conference for approval or otherwise,⁽¹⁹⁾ after Allan had signed an agreement to accept the constitution of the Labour Party. Cleland Labour Party, a branch of the North Lanark constituency, organised its own conference to foster Allan's nomination, although the Union agreed to dissociate itself from this action⁽²⁰⁾. By the time Allan's nomination was finally ruled out of order, he had become Secretary of the Lanarkshire Miners and the dispute for control was raging within the Scottish miners' union. In 1929 North Lanark had had two selection conferences because at the first there was a tied vote, before an ILP nominee, Jenny Lee, contested (and won) the seat for Labour.

North Lanark was one seat that the miners lost from their list of sponsored candidatures. In fact there was no question in 1929 of additional candidatures, and the miners in Scotland found it difficult to finance their existing seats. It had been agreed that only the traditional group, Adamson's union, was eligible for Labour Party affiliation,⁽²¹⁾

18 Ibid., January 10, 1927.

19 Lanarkshire Miners Executive, June 10, 1927.

20 Ibid., June 17, 1927.

21 Scottish Executive, 16 September, 1928.

and when it was unable to bear the financial burden, the Miners' Union nationally devised a new scheme for helping the poorer regions to maintain their representation. The Midlands and Yorkshire areas in particular were asked to provide finance for candidates in Scotland, with grants based on a levy of membership, the aim being to secure at least as many miners' candidates as in 1924⁽²²⁾.

Even then the miners had difficulty in meeting their commitments. A week before the election there had been no final agreement to sponsorship in Stirling and Falkirk and in the end a smaller amount than normal (£200) was offered. The miners were determined to hold on to their representation and Falkirk delegates complained to the Scottish Conference of 1930 that the miners had had no right to rush them into a general election without knowing where the money was coming from⁽²³⁾. The Stirling Division of the party insisted for the future that they 'did not want to find a general election coming along with the DLP placed in the same position as it was on the last occasion'.

It was a far cry from the years after the war when the miners had not only sponsored candidates, but provided full-time organisers and even constituted local parties. Now the miners, as one of their delegates told the 1930 Conference, had to ask the rest of the Labour Party for help:

For reasons well known to all, the miners had not recently been able to do so much financially as they had done in the past...The miners were going to maintain with all the power they could the representation they held. They would do all they could to finance their candidates, and

22 Glasgow Herald, 12 January 1929.

23 Labour Party Scottish Conference Report, 1930. p.38

until they could do so, they were entitled to ask other parties in the various divisions where the miners had met all expenses for many years to play their part...It was only right that the other units should assist the miners at a time like this. (24)

24 Ibid., p.37.

IV THE INDEPENDENT LABOUR PARTY

It was essentially then the status of and the changing character of the Independent Labour Party in Scotland that was to determine what sort of Labour Party Scotland had in 1929 as the general election approached. And what we shall find in our examination is, firstly, that the ILP was conscious throughout the late twenties of how it lacked an industrial base in Scotland and was attempting to remedy this deficiency; secondly, that the ILP was itself partly exhausted by the failure of the miners' strike; thirdly, that the ILP became embroiled in and weakened by the problems of Communist influence; and finally, and perhaps most important, that the victors in the battle for control of the ILP and the Labour Movement in Scotland were not the Maxton-Wheatley group and the left-wing elements but the centre groups. In 1929 Maxton may have controlled the ILP in Britain: his base was being eroded in Scotland, so much so that few went with him after the ILP disaffiliated from the Labour Party in the thirties.

It was the Independent Labour Party that was the fulcrum of Labour Party activity within Scotland. Almost all Labour Party candidates in 1929 were members of the ILP. Of the 68 candidates 67 were members and 30 were sponsored by them. According to the 1928 Labour Party conference, three-quarters of Labour Party speakers were ILP activists. Even in 1932, Arthur Woodburn had to admit when he became Scottish Labour Party Secretary that 'the real drive was in the Independent Labour Party'⁽¹⁾.

The ILP's low membership reflected how far Labour was from being a mass membership party. In 1924, ILP membership in Scotland was estimated to be 5,200 rising during and after the Labour Government to a peak of 8,030 in 1925. Standing still at 7,170 despite the reduction in branches and membership during the miners' strike in 1926, the Scottish Party became the largest regional membership

1 A Woodburn, op.cit., p.68.

within the British ILP. By 1927, with only 5,440 it had fallen below Lancashire and although there was a leap in 1927-28, to 6,010, membership stood only at 4,800 in February 1929, less than it had been in 1924.⁽²⁾ Nevertheless branches had increased in number from less than 200-171-in 1923 to over 300-321-in 1926 as the party moved into the backward areas of Scotland. But although the Scottish ILP throughout the period formed a disproportionately large section of the ILP in Britain, there were only 267 branches in 1929, most concentrated in the industrial centres of population. Areas like Stirlingshire, Galloway, and the Highlands were paying little or no affiliation fees.

It was however a combination of the Independent Labour Party and trade union sponsorship of the party that kept back the development of Labour's local constituency organisation, according to views down south. There was clearly anxiety about the 'party within a party' problem.

- 2 The figures are taken from A Marwick, *The Shape of the Party*, from his thesis on the ILP, op.cit.

	<u>Scotland</u>	<u>Britain</u>	<u>Glasgow Estimates</u>
1923-24	5260	25,976 (776)	c4,300
1924-25	8030	34,140 (1038)	c5,100
1925-26	7170	24,673 (1075)	c5,000
1926-27	5440	26,840 (900)	c5,100
1927-28	6010	25,320	c5,250
1928-29	4800	20,850 (746)	-

ILP Federation.

But these figures may in Scotland's case be an exaggeration and in Britain's case an underestimate, given the distinctions drawn finally in the rest of Britain between paying members (the numbers included in table) and members. For example, Marwick suggests that actual members of the ILP in 1926 was not 24,673 but around 56,000.

When the National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers' delegate suggested to Morrison that one of the reasons for low individual membership was that the Independent Labour Party was more active in Scotland than in certain parts of England, Morrison's reply was:

They must be careful not to make this a question of conflict. The ILP had its own job and functioned in its own way and he did not want to do anything which suggested he might want to discredit it. All he was concerned about was the problems of the Labour Party in Scotland.

But he was to add: 'The Labour Party on its old basis was a federal organisation and until they got the individual membership there was no actual body of individuals on whom they could rely as being part of the actual machinery of the party',⁽³⁾.

Earlier at the 1927 Conference the National Executive spokesman had reminded delegates that the Labour Party was not in the control of one section:

No organisation in the view of the National Executive had an infeasible right to any constituency. The organisation concerned in each case was the Labour Party. It was not the Miners' Labour Party in one constituency or an ILP Labour Party in another constituency. ⁽⁴⁾

The problem was that in Scotland it was exactly that.

3 Labour Party, Scottish Conference, Report, 1930, p.46.

4 Labour Party, Report by Davies and Shepherd on Scottish Conference, 1928, Scottish Executive Papers, March, 11, 1927.

There was no doubt that beneath the surface, there were major conflicts between ILP and the Labour Party organisation. When in 1930 the Labour Party made a further attempt to encourage individual membership the Executive spokesman had to add:

It was just possible there might be some suspicion towards the resolution as ILPers might feel it was an invasion of their activities. That was not so. There was a vast number of people prepared to vote and work for Labour who were not yet prepared to join the ILP.

When one delegate argued that if the Labour Party spent all its time recruiting individual members and setting up propaganda machinery, 'the ILP would no longer be necessary', Dollan disagreed, but he warned on behalf of the ILP:

It was only right to say...they felt that in areas where they had built up a comparatively useful political as well as propaganda organisation, they sometimes found the Labour Party concentrating its efforts there, to the neglect of outlying areas where there was no organisation of any kind. He felt there was a need for further co-ordination between the Labour Party and the ILP to tackle the question of organisation in such areas where political work had not begun. (5)

Choosing candidates was to be a problem which caused local disagreements and was not helped when the ILP claimed its funds were in its control and not under the control of the Divisional Labour Party. The ILP also complained it was steamrollered⁽⁶⁾. In some areas complaints from the ILP were numerous about selection

5 Labour Party Scottish Conference Report, 1930, p.39.

6 Labour Party Scottish Executive, June 24, 1928.

conferences, particularly against the formation and over-representation of women's and men's sections. But the Scottish Executive complained that 'similar questions had been raised with regard to branches of the ILP and suggested a period of probation might reasonably be introduced into the local rules'⁽⁷⁾.

The situation grew more difficult throughout the twenties as local Labour parties came into existence. In 1929 Dollan complained that some local Labour parties were set up by the Co-operative Party 'with only a small membership', with the result that 'a handful of people had twenty representatives' on selection conferences 'as against two from the ILP although the latter might be raising the money'⁽⁸⁾. However, even when the local finances of the ILP were in a poor shape, as they were in Glasgow, the party still continued to seek and endorse candidatures⁽⁹⁾.

The conflict was not simply an ILP-Labour one but often over the type of representation achieved. Labour's members from the ILP were mainly middle class. As one prominent Scottish trade unionist was to claim, it was 'the careerists' who came through the ILP:

Anyone who could describe himself as an MA, BSc, could get all the wirepullers behind him and the ordinary members were told, 'Don't you bother about the local Labour Party: be loyal to the ILP', and we will get somebody from the top, some new rich comrade to speak to you on public bodies. The composition of the ILP panel had always been a bit of a mystery to him. (10)

7 Ibid., June 19, 1929. Also Scottish Conference Executive Report, 1930, p.10.

8 Labour Party Scottish Conference Report, 1930, p.40.

9 Glasgow ILP Federation Management Committee, June 22, September 4, 1928.

10 Labour Party Scottish Conference Report, 1931, p.44.

Even in 1930, however, there were only twenty-seven divisional parties registered at Scottish Conference, with three trades and labour councils standing in lieu of constituency parties. It meant that the main initiative for candidates was still coming from the ILP and the miners.

On policy too, the ILP exercised the main initiative. Following the 1924 Government, industrial questions came to the forefront, and the ILP attempted to lead. While the 1925 Scottish Conference of the Labour Party refused to criticise the Labour leadership, it did represent a leftward shift in the support it gave the unemployed workers' movement, which was predominantly controlled by the Communist Party. When the Chairman of the Conference ruled out of order a motion which had come from the National Unemployed Workers' Committee, he was defeated, and Conference accepted a policy which demanded government intervention in creating jobs, a shorter working week, and rent reductions⁽¹¹⁾.

The ILP made the running increasingly as it came to see its role as a supportive one for militancy within the trade union movement. At its January conference in 1925 a motion was remitted to a special industrial conference which while supporting nationalisation, agitated for a 'reform' policy based on a forty hour week, the abolition of overtime, the establishment of workshop committees, trade union amalgamation, and full maintenance for unemployed by the state⁽¹²⁾. Drawing up an industrial policy was not so easy. At a special miners' conference there was disagreement over the steps towards the nationalisation of coal. Shinwell, who stated that a mines' nationalisation bill would have been in the 1925 Queens Speech if a Labour Government had survived, said that Labour should purchase, not confiscate the mines, that the miners' claim for :

11 Ibid., Report, 1925, pp.39-40.

12 Forward, January 17, 1925.

controlling one half of the industry's governing body after nationalisation should be watered down to one third, and that the purchase price should be on the basis of outputs. His speech met with 'no applause' and a motion urging nationalisation along the lines advocated by the miners was supported⁽¹³⁾.

The ILP's increasing involvement in industrial issues was underlined by the Glasgow ILP which formed an industrial committee, for educational work amongst its members on the Clyde, and to plan a reorganisation of Clyde industry⁽¹⁴⁾. As Dollan argued, 'pending national ownership there are palliatives' (such as a shorter working week, plant modernisation and higher wages), and as far as nationalisation was concerned, trade unions were not equipped for their administration as state services. The Glasgow ILP were particularly interested in some form of reorganisation of shipbuilding. It also felt that as a priority ILP members should be involved in industrial action⁽¹⁵⁾. Dollan, in particular, favoured closer links between the ILP and the General Council of the STUC⁽¹⁶⁾.

This new link-up between trade unionism and politics was hampered by the effect of the depression on both trade unionism and ILP membership. While the Scottish Labour Party and the ILP were to the left of the Labour Party nationally in their support for militancy, the weak Scottish trade union movement was, Dollan felt, 'the most conservative section' in Britain. He argued that the

13 Ibid., January 31, 1925.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., February 21, 1925.

16 Ibid., April 13, 1925.

STUC leaders were 'too much concerned with what they call the structure of trade unionism and neglect the spiritual and propaganda aspects of the movement'. He believed that there were too many unions and too few trade unionists.

The ILP at this time was responding to the threat of the Minority Movement and the Communist Party. During 1925 Forward, for example, became increasingly vitriolic in its attacks on the Communist Party and the Minority Movement, although it also gave space to debates between Emrys Hughes and Willie Gallacher on the merits of revolutionary action⁽¹⁷⁾. Maxton, Wheatley, and other leading Scottish MPs were involved in supporting moves for Communist membership of the Labour Party, but others like Johnston were worried about both the reliance on industrial action and the influence of the Minority Movement. Wheatley wrote:

We must guard against the agent provocateurs with their incitements to violence, insurrection and red armies. Such incitements even when bona fide are madness: they play directly into the hands of the capitalist party. We are 90% of the nation. When we will it, the parasitic exploitative system will go. But foolish incitements to attempt by the shotgun what we refuse to take by the ballot box can only end in tragedy and disaster.⁽¹⁸⁾

It was Wheatley who was mapping out a new course for Labour in Scotland, arguing that the varying views among the unions had to be unified⁽¹⁹⁾.

He was realistic about the situation: 'parliamentary action in present circumstances appeared practically futile, except to those who think that the starving workers should be satisfied with the prospect of another one shilling to old age pensions when Labour comes into office during the next generation'.⁽¹⁹⁾ The Labour

17 Ibid., February 7, 14, 1925.

18 Ibid., August 22, 1925.

19 Ibid., August 8, 1925.

party was 'powerless'. But while Wheatley, with Maxton, favoured a 'united front' first around Lansbury's left-wing group, then around the Sunday Worker newspaper's call for left unity, there was little enthusiasm for it in Scotland. Newbold, a former Communist, warned that the Communists planned 'to use him (Wheatley) against Ramsay MacDonald and the rest of his colleagues',⁽²⁰⁾.

Wheatley's new view of socialism was developed in a series of articles in the Glasgow Evening Standard and Forward. He opposed both free trade and protection and argued for an underconsumptionist view, that high government expenditure would increase prosperity and jobs, and suggested that what was needed was the regulation of foreign trade. The return to the gold standard and the bank rate decisions of Churchill he saw as leading to an inevitable attack on working class living standards⁽²¹⁾. But Wheatley was for 'socialism by degrees'. He explained:

I cannot believe that the people who have just voted Liberal or Tory, are quite ready to take up rifles and shoot the men they have just elected. In addition to the fact that it is very undemocratic, I think it is also hopeless and stupid. It is of course argued that in the event of a Labour Government being returned to power, a fascist army would at once be organised to resist our policies. We shall see. Then the majority of the people will favour Labour's policy. Besides which, whatever party is in power controls the army and the navy.⁽²²⁾

His basic argument was that in the face of the attack on standards of living it was his, and the left-wing's job to end 'the despondency and tranquillity', which were 'the dominating emotions of our movement, if it is correct to describe as a movement something which has ceased to move',⁽²³⁾.

20 Ibid., August 29, 1925.

21 Ibid., February 28, March 21, 28, 1925.

22 Ibid., December 5, 1925.

23 Ibid., August 8, 1925.

As the pendulum swung from political to industrial activity, there was no improvement in ILP or Labour Party membership. The year to April 1926 was, Glasgow ILP organiser, MacLure, concluded, 'one of the most difficult in the history of the ILP'. He spoke of a: 'general feeling...of political indifference. There has also been a lowering of the general enthusiasm due to a great extent to the disappointment and reaction following the short term of office of the Labour Government',⁽²⁴⁾ and it seemed that ILP membership in Glasgow had fallen below 3,000⁽²⁵⁾. In a referendum on Communist affiliation to the Glasgow Trades and Labour Council, 31 of 36 branches voted, involving 2292 voting members⁽²⁶⁾.

What in the end held together a disorganised and divided movement in these difficult circumstances was support for the miners. Two thirds of ILP branches were said to be in mining areas, and the ILP was in no doubt that a defeat of the miners would be a defeat for the whole Labour Movement. In August 1925 Wheatley had called for 'unprecedented solidarity among the unions',⁽²⁷⁾ He argued that 'for the next nine months the workers must prepare on a new scale and on new lines for the greatest struggle in their history'. He warned of a fascist menace:

The capitalists will get their fascists ready to carry on a transport system that will make them independent of the workers during a general strike. The navy will be ordered to man the mines...If working class soldiers can be relied on to shoot down working class strikers, capitalism will get a new lease of life by making Britain a land of coolies.⁽²⁸⁾

24 Ibid., April 10, 1926.

25 Ibid., February 20, 1926.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., August 15, 1925.

28 Ibid., August 8, 1925.

The ILP's policy was to stand by the miners, and Emrys Hughes argued that:

If the British Labour Movement is going to think of the future at all, it must be prepared to fight on this issue as it has never fought before, and must use all the weight of its political and industrial power to prevent the miners being defeated.(29)

The party in Scotland could unite around the miners' issue, and despite different attitudes to MacDonald's leadership both the left and right could attack MacDonald for some of his views. When MacDonald blamed the loss of two by-elections in Ayr and Dunbartonshire, on 'some oratory at the ILP Conference in Edinburgh on the subject of confiscation versus compensation',⁽³⁰⁾ the Scottish Council argued that the work in both constituencies was 'a moral victory',⁽³¹⁾ and the elections were lost through the collapse of Liberal votes to the Tories. Patrick Dollan, one of MacDonald's supporters, stated that MacDonald and others were 'out of touch with Scottish organisation and activities' in saying that they could 'have been won for socialism if the candidate had pursued a different policy',⁽³²⁾. A better result he felt might have been obtained if the critics 'had come north and assisted in the campaign',⁽³³⁾.

29 Ibid., June 27, 1925.

30 Ibid., March 13, 1926.

31 Labour Party Scottish Conference Report, 1926, pp.3-4.

32 Ibid., p.36.

33 Ibid.

During the General Strike and the much more prolonged miners' strike the ILP gave full and unquestioning support to the miners, acting according to their Scottish organiser William Stewart as 'an auxiliary force', raising funds, organising food centres, placing branch rooms at the miners' disposal, and using its propaganda and speakers to put the miners case throughout Scotland⁽³⁴⁾. Indeed throughout the strike ILP branches collected more than £10,000 for miners' relief⁽³⁵⁾. Nevertheless the effect of the strike was to leave the ILP weakened. It damaged the party finances and financial recovery was difficult. With two-thirds of the branches in mining areas, many were unable to pay their affiliation fees⁽³⁶⁾. While Labour did relatively well in the municipal elections of 1926,⁽³⁷⁾ the long-term effect of 1926 was to dampen militancy and to weaken resources. As the Glasgow Federation recorded, 1927 was 'particularly difficult due to the general apathy and the reaction of the general strike'⁽³⁸⁾.

This period marked a shift from the left in Labour politics, and was particularly characterised by the growing isolation of the ILP left, led by Maxton and Wheatley, not just in the Labour Party but also in the ILP within Scotland. Even Patrick Dollan, who was to be Maxton's adversary for the years to come, was astonished at how far to the right the trade union movement in Scotland moved between the middle of 1927 and 1928. At the 1927 STUC Conference, delegates had accepted a motion 'condemning the propaganda of industrial peace conducted by leading trade union officials whether individually or in co-operation with leading employers'. In 1928,

34 Ibid., August, 21, 1927.

35 Ibid., January 9, 1927.

36 Ibid., December 12, 19, 26, 1927.

37 Glasgow ILP Federation, Minutes, April 1, 1927.

38 Ibid., Management Sub Committee, February 3, 1927.

a motion attacking the negotiations between Mond and the TUC was defeated by a four to one majority. Similarly in 1927 a motion for a Great Britain-Russia trade union conference was accepted but rejected by 31 in 1928. A complete turnaround had been effected.

It was in this atmosphere that Maxton and Wheatley attempted to stir the British Labour Movement leftwards. They have been since accused of misreading history, of assuming a radicalisation in Britain after the General Strike when none existed, although it is clear that they believed the opposite was true, and their self assumed role was indeed to remove the despair, despondency, and defeatism that characterised the working class movement in Britain. What they did misread was their support in Scotland. When Maxton, who became Chairman of the ILP in 1926, spoke of his role as qualifying the Labour Party's 'tendency to be entirely taken up with the immediately practical, which always creates the tendency to lose sight of ultimate ideals', he believed he was applying the lessons of Scotland to Britain: 'I see no reason why what we managed to achieve in Scotland, should not be achieved in all parts of the country.'

The ILP's policy programme, Socialism in our Time, had been produced by the ILP's intellectuals and owed little to Scottish influences. In its original and later forms it included provision for a National Health Service, non-contributory pensions, the nationalisation of key industries, and the reorganisation of banking. At its core lay three policies: state control of money and credit; the granting of family allowances; and the guarantee of a realistic living wage through the setting up in each industry of a commission to specify wages for it. In the document's 1926-7 form, while a 'living wage' was not to be legally imposed, an industrial commission could indirectly intervene, with a National Investment Board responsible for controlling credit. By 1929 the programme laid down that a living wage was obligatory on industry,

to be paid within two years of its enactment by a Labour government; that the key industries - coal, transport and banking - would be nationalised, and that Government control would be introduced over the bulk purchase of imports and exports; that other industries which failed to pay the living wage would be nationalised; and that greater controls would be exercised over credit and prices, with major increases in taxation. In many ways it was the socialist complement to a Keynesian programme.

It was Socialism in our Time that Maxton and the ILP left saw as the raison d'etre. As Maxton told the ILP conference in 1930:

I was asked to use my Chairmanship to spread the ideas of 'Socialism in our Time' by propaganda, to urge its acceptance through the wider Labour Movement, and to get it accepted by the nation. This is the task which I have honestly and sincerely tried to fulfil.

The bid to win the Labour Party Conference for Socialism in our Time failed in 1927, when MacDonald successfully persuaded the party to prepare its own programme, what was to become Labour and the Nation. From the left-wing point of view what was more serious was the loss of support within the ILP in Scotland. At the January 1928 conference of the Party, left-wing motions for a 'return to the proposal for a capital levy', and opposing the talks on co-operation in industry were supported, but the ILP 'living wage' proposals were turned down. Dollan called at the 1928 conference for the essence of 'Socialism in our Time' to be a minimum wage. For Wheatley this was merely a plan to control the incomes of the poorest. But it was accepted by the conference in preference to the 'living wage' plan.

The incorporation of the 'minimum wage' proposal into Socialism in our Time meant that what had been a revolutionary programme to make the payment of wages a basis for nationalising industries, and of course redistributing income and wealth, had become something which was little more than an extension of the trades boards system. Maxton who was later to accuse Dollan of disloyalty in

taking such an independent line, was clearly outmanoeuvred. When the ILP Conference met in Norwich in April, the Scottish Divisional Council's position was accepted.

For Maxton and Wheatley it was a major blow, although nationally the ILP was to revoke the Norwich decision during the next year. Maxton explained the difference between his approach and that of Dollan later:

The old method of approaching the living wage problem would be correctly described as patching up capitalism. The old method looks at a particular industry and lays down such a minimum as the industry can afford under its existing organisation. Our approach is fundamentally different. We say that the miners, cotton workers, and railwaymen are serving the nation, and it is the first duty of the nation to insist that they shall be paid a living wage for their service. If their particular industry cannot afford them a living wage, the nation certainly can.

The 'living wage' argument was merely the tip of the iceberg in the changing relationships between Maxton and the Scottish ILP. In Scotland the party was increasingly prepared to be loyal to Ramsay MacDonald, and it was a measure of how far the Scottish Party were moving against Maxton's leadership when there was a major Scottish reaction to the ILP's decision in 1927 not to nominate MacDonald as an ILP delegate to the Labour Party Conference or to the Treasurership of the Labour Party. When the Executive made its recommendation against MacDonald, a 'round robin' letter of protest was signed by nine Scottish MPs, Barr, Duncan and Willie Graham, Mitchell, Shields, Westwood, Wright, Brown, and Adamson. Others who signed included Agnes Dollan, Joseph Duncan and the ex-MPs, Shinwell, Climie, Muir, and Hay. While Johnston remained agnostic on the issue for the time being, the direction of support from the ILP's leading figures in Scotland was clear. At the ILP National Conference the Executive recommendation was, however, upheld by 213 to 118, providing English support for the decision at a time when Scotland seemed to be moving back in support of MacDonald.

Increasingly Maxton came under criticism for his activities in opposing Parliamentary Labour Party policy in the House of Commons. In December 1927, McNeill Weir joined the public critics of Maxton and Wheatley, arguing in an article, 'Do Rows Help Labour', that the behaviour of Maxton, Kirkwood, and Stephen was equivalent to 'disloyalty'⁽³⁹⁾. He later elaborated his attack:

Maxton knows what I am attacking began early in 1923...I suggest he cannot deny the following:

1. That for months past the press have been proclaiming an open socialist split, socialist revolt etc.
2. Time and time again a tiny handful of the party have flouted the party's decisions and contemptuously ignored the advice of the party...

He claimed to have been astonished at the volume of support for his criticisms from the party both outside and inside the Commons⁽⁴⁰⁾.

The Cook-Maxton manifesto was the breaking point so far as Scotland was concerned. Maxton's liaison with Cook originated in the support the ILP gave the miners during the general strike, and in Maxton and Wheatley's realisation that the ILP needed an industrial base for political activity. Wheatley had seen Cook as the emergent hero of the Labour Movement. No leaders, he said in 1926, were 'more loved and trusted more than Smith and Cook'. 'During the Bothwell by-election', he wrote, 'I saw young men and women literally kiss Cook's garments. The mothers among the miners regard him as a deliverer'⁽⁴¹⁾. On a number of occasions,

39 Forward, December 17, 1927.

40 Ibid., January 7, 1928.

41 Ibid., June 19, 1926.

Cook came to Scotland and once visited the Highlands with Maxton and Dollan to recover after he had collapsed during a Glasgow city hall meeting⁽⁴²⁾.

The Cook-Maxton manifesto contained only two basic points, that the Labour Party was a working class party and that its historic purpose was to replace capitalism by socialism. The occasion of its publication was the imminent expulsion of Cook from the TUC's General Council and the appearance of the Labour Party's new statement Labour and the Nation, which, Maxton felt, contained 'too much in the way of rhetorical flourish and too little in the way of solid legislative proposals'. But behind its publication lay Maxton's and Wheatley's belief that they needed a wider audience and support outside the ILP, if necessary. It was not issued in a mistaken belief that the revolution was round the corner, for it was felt that in any straight choice a working class majority would reject Socialism in our Time for MacDonald's and Thomas's 'inevitability of gradualism'. In the fuller document, Our Case for a Socialist Revival, it was argued that:

The Labour Party should scrap its existing programme and develop a vigorous socialist programme. It should retain its federal basis and allow scope within its ranks for all working class political parties and all members of these parties. In doing so it would avoid not only the danger of a split but would call forth the enthusiasm of the rank and file.

Parliamentary measures were to be judged on whether they developed the class struggle, improved working class conditions, eased the transition to socialism, and helped eliminate the reactionary bastions of capitalism⁽⁴³⁾.

42 Ibid., October 9, 1926.

43 A Cook, J Maxton, Our Case for a Socialist Revival, (London, 1928).

The Cook-Maxton campaign was launched at a rally in Glasgow which by all accounts was 'disastrous' and left Wheatley fuming with rage. The other nationwide demonstrations went ahead in July, August and September - and a study of Kirkwood's balance sheets shows that a large number of people attended, and a large amount of correspondence supporting Maxton survives⁽⁴⁴⁾. But the Cook-Maxton manifesto ensured the isolation of Maxton in Scotland, brought Ramsay MacDonald and the Scottish ILP closer than they had been for years, and was the beginning of the end for the left within the Scottish ILP.

The manifesto laid bare the shift in political opinion in Scotland towards Dollan and the more pragmatic elements of the Labour Party, and it gave opponents of Maxton the chance to isolate him, Wheatley, and the left wing. The first reaction to the manifesto was one of surprise and hostility. Hughes was 'left in doubt as to what Cook and Maxton meant' with a manifesto 'full of vague generalities', a 'violent, vigorous and entirely futile display of desperate shadow boxing'. Dollan was most angry of all. His motion that there be no co-operation at all with the Cook-Maxton campaign was narrowly defeated at the ILP's National Administrative Council, but it won unanimous support in Scotland. Dollan's position was clear: 'Speaking as Chairman of the divisional council in Scotland he regarded the manifesto as the most serious interference with ILP organisation and standing that had happened in his time'⁽⁴⁵⁾.

At the Scottish Divisional Council meeting there was unanimity that 'they disagreed with the spirit and purpose of the document', and Dollan went on to state confidently that it 'was unlikely that

44 Cook-Maxton Campaign Papers, 1928, contained in Maxton Papers.

45 ILP National Administrative Council, July, 1928.

there will be any more unofficial campaign meetings in Scotland' in its support⁽⁴⁶⁾. While he was factually wrong, since an Edinburgh rally was held in September, he was right in that Scotland played little part in the attempts to swing the 1928 Labour Party Conference behind Maxton and against Labour and the Nation.

Maxton realised that he was out of touch with the Scottish leadership of the party. He was to tell the National Administrative Council that he could not rely on the ILP to help him organise a Scottish campaign for the manifesto, which was why he had acted unofficially with 'the support of two old friends and old members of the ILP, John Wheatley and John Cruden'⁽⁴⁷⁾. His explanation to the Scottish NAC was the same. The offence caused by the private organisation of the Glasgow meeting was unintended, but 'the local ILP leaders were hostile' and 'therefore it became necessary to appeal over their heads to the rank and file'.

The problem, as Dollan saw it, was that Maxton's connection with Cook and his open invitation to other groups seemed to achieve what the ILP in Scotland had spent years avoiding: an open association with the Communist Party and the Minority Movement. Maxton vigorously denied this, he strongly resented the idea which he detected among some of his colleagues that he was 'a disguised Communist' who intended to further 'the interests of the Communist Party'. He said he had experienced pressure from both minority movement and communist organisations to let them adopt the proposals and put a newspaper press behind them; 'this he had definitely turned down to avoid starting new movements and factions'. However

46 Forward, July 28, 1928.

47 ILP National Administrative Council, June 30, 1928.

Dollan saw the matter another way. The ILP Chairman had called conferences outside the ILP which had included 'extreme elements...and he stressed the extreme difficulties which had beset the Glasgow movement in withstanding Communist Party attacks'. He believed that the Chairman had innocently associated himself with these events which nevertheless constituted setbacks to the party in Scotland.

The Cook-Maxton campaign continued but outside Scotland. While it fizzled out, it was not the failure people had argued it would be, with a number of enthusiastic meetings around the country. But it failed in its major primary purpose, to prevent the acceptance of Labour and the Nation at the Birmingham Conference. Maxton accepted defeat. Both he and Wheatley argued that their role now was to ensure that those elements of Labour and the Nation that were radical appeared in the programme of the next Labour Government. As Wheatley put it:

If our enemies think that Maxton or I or any of our friends are going to leave the party, they are as far wrong as they usually are in things political. But we do intend to use our influence in the movement to keep it on the direct road to socialism.

The duty of socialists was 'to concentrate on the selection from the Birmingham programme of the socialist items and make them as far as possible the programme of the next government', and in accepting defeat Maxton outlined his four immediate demands that he would fight for in the future - more nationalisation, the living wage, family allowances, and price controls. The only comfort for him and Wheatley was that the 'living wage' demand was remitted for a further report by the National Executive⁽⁴⁸⁾.

48 Maxton and Wheatley's comments were widely quoted in the national newspapers of the day. See in particular Glasgow Herald, October, 1928.

In Scotland, Dollan found simply that there was common cause between the 1928 Conference decisions and the ILP programme, a position that led him to believe Maxton and Wheatley were in disagreement with the mainstream of the ILP and Labour Party, and also with each other:

An examination of the ILP programme and the Labour Party programme shows clearly that there is much in common between the two programmes and that there is absolutely no reason why the ILP should not give its wholehearted support to nine tenths of the proposals with which it agrees. The Labour Party programme is nearer the ILP programme than the whole hog revolutionary programme that Maxton has outlined in collaboration with A J Cook...Wheatley's programme on the other hand is different from Maxton's. (49)

The pressures from Scotland against Maxton were continuous throughout 1928. The Scottish ILP Council complained about the collection of funds for the Cook-Maxton Campaign⁽⁵⁰⁾, and about the financial appeal made in The New Leader for funds⁽⁵¹⁾. With Shinwell's support, Dollan was to become a Scottish voice on the National Administrative Council of the ILP in opposition to the majority. He was to object to the new 'living wage' report,⁽⁵²⁾ asking that his dissent be recorded, and the breach was to grow as Maxton led an internal opposition to the official Labour policies.

49 Forward, October 6, 1928.

50 ILP National Administrative Council, September 21, 1928.

51 Ibid., February 9, 10, 1928.

52 Ibid.

Increasingly therefore the Scottish ILP leadership and the official Labour Party leadership were united in opposition to the British ILP leadership of Maxton. MacDonald, who had been under attack from Dollan in 1926 over his attitude to left wing influence in Scotland, could say in Forward in December 1928:

The ILP cannot go on as an independent party laying down political policies for its own, trying to impose a spurious allegiance for itself and defying the decisions and the policy of their colleagues in Parliament. (53)

Dollan, however, could never win over the ILP nationally. When in 1929 he and Shinwell stood for the Chairmanship against Maxton, they were defeated by 284 to 39 for Shinwell and 38 for Dollan⁽⁵⁴⁾. The rift between Dollan and Maxton became increasingly bitter. When disaffiliation became the issue in 1931, Dollan and the Scottish Council of the ILP were adamantly opposed. They believed that 'In Scotland the effect of disaffiliation would be to split the party from top to bottom' with a probable six to four against disaffiliation, probably only one third of the branches favouring it⁽⁵⁵⁾.

While the changing character of the Scottish ILP only became crystal clear after 1929, the direction in thinking and position was clear by that time. What Dollan was to say in 1931 on the question of ILP disaffiliation was what had guided his movement to become independent of the Maxton and Wheatley left since 1928.

53 Forward, December 15, 1928.

54 Ibid., April 6, 1939.

55 ILP National Administrative Council, November 7, 8, 1931.

Maxton's position was so weak prior to the 1929 election in Scotland that although the National Executive called it a 'minor matter' he was accused by the Scottish Executive Committee of accepting a mandate from Bridgeton, a disaffiliated party, and associating himself with 'confiscation' proposals, with the Anti-Imperialist League (which had been 'specifically condemned' by the Labour Party) and with 'publicly' encouraging the Leith candidate, Wilson, and others 'to defy the Labour Party'. He had also sponsored the Sunday Worker newspaper which had been 'officially condemned' by the party early in 1929. The Scottish Executive Committee decided to ask Maxton for 'an undertaking of loyalty for the future',⁽⁵⁶⁾ although at a later meeting it was 'agreed to drop the matter',⁽⁵⁷⁾ apparently because of headquarters' advice⁽⁵⁸⁾.

But the splits within the ILP had taken their toll. On top of the recession, there had been a drain in membership for other reasons. At a Glasgow Organising Conference of the ILP in December 1928, where it was reported membership was 'down all over the country' it was finally agreed that fallen party membership was due to:

1. Industrial Depression
2. General apathy among the workers
3. The competition of the Labour Party
4. The feeling that the ILP as a separate party was no longer necessary...The Cook-Maxton manifesto had also had a disturbing effect upon the work of the party⁽⁵⁹⁾.

56 Labour Party, Scottish Executive Minutes, March 18, 1929.

57 Ibid., June 10, 1929.

58 Ibid., April 15, 1929.

59 ILP Glasgow Federation Management Committee, January 18, 1929.

Ironically as the ILP seemed less relevant as the organising group for individual activists, the Labour Party and the ILP were both losing members. But even in 1929, all but one of Labour's Scottish candidates were ILP members and twenty nine were sponsored by the ILP. This was in contrast to England where a majority were now sponsored by local constituency parties⁽⁶⁰⁾.

60 Labour Party Scottish Conference, Report, 1930, p.37.

CHAPTER 8

THE RIGHT IN SCOTLAND 1924-29

I A LIBERAL REVIVAL?

A period of turmoil followed the Liberal Party's disastrous showing in the election of 1924. By December 1924, the final steps had been taken to Liberal reunion, with the coming together of the Scottish Liberal Federation and the Scottish National Liberal Council, but at the same time Lloyd George's election to the position of Parliamentary Chairman sparked off new divisions. While 26 MPs supported him, seven opposed and seven abstained. The Radical Group formed under Runciman, expressed the fear that too many Liberal MPs had been elected with Conservative support and would not offer regular opposition to the Government. Benn in Leith and McKenzie Wood in the Western Isles joined it, both later to resign as Liberal MPs⁽¹⁾.

However, the immediate situation was dominated by a new by-election - in Dundee - which reflected the new course Liberalism was to take for the next five years. Nationally the party machine was to push for independence - despite the fact that locally there were some doubts. When the death of Morel brought about a by-election, there was in fact no great Liberal enthusiasm locally for fighting. So close was the co-operation with the Unionist Party that a meeting of Unionist and Liberal Associations, with six on each side, was held and a majority of Liberals agreed that the seat would not be fought⁽²⁾. An anti-socialist association was in the process of being formed in Dundee which would have provided a more permanent link between the two associations. It was the

1 The divisions within the Liberal Party in Parliament are traced by T Wilson, op.cit., p. 337-374.

2 Scotsman, December 2, 1924.

ensuing initiatives of the Unionists that forced a Liberal intervention, for the Unionist Association resolved that if the Liberals intended the seat to go by default the Unionists ought to stand and the Liberals give way to an anti-socialist candidate from the Unionists⁽³⁾. That decision met with disapproval amongst local Liberals and led them to choose John Simon as their candidate.

In response to a Liberal intervention the Unionist nominee, Wallace, pulled out and eventually on the advice of Colonel Blair from the Unionist Whip's Office, it was resolved not to split the anti-socialist vote. While the Unionist Association was 'convinced that Mr Wallace had a much better chance of winning the seat for moderate opinion than anyone else', 'rather than split the moderate vote', it was prepared 'to withdraw from the contest and allow the Liberals a clear field for a straight fight against the socialist'⁽⁴⁾. Although the Orange Tory, Ferguson, threatened to stand as an independent Unionist, the field was eventually left clear for Simon. However, the local Unionists, said their Chairman, would not give any instruction or advice on voting, and they would not make available any help, not even a motor car, to the Liberals.⁽⁴⁾ His view was that most Unionists would abstain⁽⁵⁾, although Wallace who had stood down, did urge a Unionist vote for the Liberal in a telegram to the electors⁽⁶⁾.

3 Ibid.

4 Scotsman, December 2, 1924.

5 Ibid., December 20, 1924.

6 Ibid., December 22, 1924.

The Dundee election gave the Liberals a chance to propagate an independent policy. Simon, who called himself a new Liberal, stressed he was 'not co-operating with any other party', arguing:

The new Liberalism realises that while we still require electoral reform the people now have the power in their hands to get what they want. We have now to go ahead and use the political machine to get the economic and social reforms which all want - equal opportunities for all.

While he did not oppose nationalisation in principle, he said that it did not provide the benefits intended, and he urged a social security system for each family, widow's pensions, slum clearance, new house building, and a solution to the land problem⁽⁷⁾.

But the Liberal initiative was hardly successful, losing heavily to Labour on a low poll (42.4%) despite the fact that Johnston, the Labour candidate, did not receive the endorsement of the prohibitionist MP, Scrymgeour, and the local Catholic press was against him⁽⁸⁾. In addition Gallacher the former Communist candidate was lukewarm in support for him⁽⁹⁾. Forward concluded that in these circumstances 'Dundee has dug the grave of new Liberalism as Paisley has dug the grave of the old Liberalism'⁽¹⁰⁾.

The Dundee by-election showed how far Liberalism had to travel in Scotland to re-establish its credibility. While Asquith pondered his future, in particular the offer of a peerage, the Liberal Committee of Enquiry into the Party's organisation which had been constituted before the general election toured the country to

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., December 12 and 24, 1924.

9 Dundee Advertiser, December 24, 1924.

10 Forward, December 27, 1926. The result was T Johnston (Labour) 22,973, E Simon (Liberal) 10,234.

take evidence on the state of the party. In Scotland it found plenty to ponder about. In its meeting with the Committee, the Scottish Liberal Federation concentrated on party organisation, the placing of candidates, the need for unity, and the formation of a party policy.

Firstly, speakers were 'unanimous against any form of pacts or understanding with other parties'. Second, the Scottish party wanted a clear statement of policies. They emphasised 'the need for party leaders to keep in touch with the various organisations throughout the country in order that their views on important questions of policy should be considered.' In particular they emphasised 'the desirability of those who were responsible for framing party policy, consulting with those who were responsible in Scotland, in order that the problems that affect Scotland should be dealt with in any manifesto that was issued'⁽¹¹⁾.

Third, the party was concerned about organisation, because of 'a special need for reorganising the local associations'. Indeed this was the main point on which the Liberals in Scotland would have concentrated their energies. Junior Liberal associations should be developed, and there should be far better representation of women's sections and junior sections in making party policy. There should be an increase in the supply of speakers to local associations⁽¹²⁾.

Fourthly, candidates should be 'adopted as quickly as possible'. It was argued that it would be 'an advantage to give preference to local candidates', to be placed 'as soon as possible and not just immediately before an election'. Finally, more finance should be raised in Scotland. It would be 'unwise to depend on subsidies

11 Scottish Liberal Federation, Minutes of Meeting of Conference Committee on Reorganisation Appointed by Mr Asquith, December 5, 1924.

12 Ibid.

from headquarters' and there should be local fund-raising through a monthly subscriptions' system⁽¹³⁾.

The Scottish Liberal Federation were in line with the comments the party enquiry heard throughout the country. It had found 'emphasis' throughout the country on 'the lack of candidates at the last election', the 'need for a forward fighting policy adopted by the party as a whole', 'the avoiding of pacts with other parties', and 'above all a deep desire that all differences that have existed between Liberals in the past should now be sunk in a unity that is real and effective throughout the whole party'. The enquiry argued that the party needed new personnel, younger officers (with one third of executives under thirty-five years of age), adequate representation of industrial and agricultural workers, fund-raising average £650 yearly in each constituency to pay election expenses and full-time agents:

Every constituency in Great Britain should have a Liberal candidate as soon as possible and the constituency associations should endeavour to secure its own candidate, provide an efficient organisation, including a whole-time agent and funds for propaganda.

All these recommendations had special relevance to a Scottish organisation which lacked credibility. As the Liberal Whip, Vivien Philips, was to tell the 1924 convention, that was specially called to reorganise the party, the failure at the last election was due not to 'some unexplained defect' in the organisation but to 'the failure of the party because of lack of money to put into the electoral battle-field the full fighting line of candidates'. As Sir Henry Ballantyne remarked: 'It was no use going into an election with a few candidates. They wanted candidates all over the country',⁽¹⁴⁾

13 Ibid.

14 Glasgow Herald, April 25, 1925.

As a result of the enquiry a Liberal fighting fund was set up. Originally Scotland had planned to go it alone with a fund of its own but both the Scottish representatives told the British Convention that Scotland would now join with the rest of Britain⁽¹⁵⁾. But Scotland did establish its own financial committee, chaired by Sir Henry Ballantyne. Amongst its schemes were monthly collection cards - the aim being to raise £500 and £1500 from each constituency over three years. 'A penny a week from every Liberal would do it'⁽¹⁶⁾. The scheme, said Vivien Philips was 'a bold and daring departure on their part'⁽¹⁷⁾. In addition the women's section was revitalised through the Scottish Liberal Women's Educational and Social Council, which was a part of a national not a women's federation but strictly within the SLF⁽¹⁸⁾. However the Glasgow Liberal Council was almost defunct and did not respond to resuscitation⁽¹⁹⁾.

At their General Council Annual Meeting in 1925, Sir John Anthony, who became the new Chairman, remarked that party funds were in far better shape than ever before, but he urged there should be unity among Liberals. He did so by pointing out that they were few enough in numbers without having any lukewarm supporters in their midst⁽²⁰⁾, and by the end of 1925 the 'million pound fund' campaign to be sponsored by the rank and file had withered.

15 Glasgow Herald, January 31, 1925.

16 Ibid., April 25, 1925.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid., March 1, 1925.

19 Ibid., June 5, 1925.

20 Ibid., April 25, 1928.

The aim, in addition to improving finance and organisation, was to give the Liberal Party a new policy. At a national level a new statement of policy came in January 1925 with an economic, industrial and agricultural programme, couched in general terms. It was then put to the Scottish Party's Joint Organising Committee to consider Scottish amendments. It was agreed there that the Scottish issues requiring emphasis were: the taxation of land values, land settlement schemes, security of tenure for smallholders (and the promotion of allotments) as well as temperance reform and the creating of local parliaments. In their draft in fact the Scottish party opposed public ownership, although approving land settlements for ex-servicemen with fixity of tenure, and a Land Commission with compulsory powers to create smallholdings. It also wanted improved housing in rural areas, and to 'cease penalising private enterprise' it wanted a switch from rating to taxing land values on all land. These recommendations which came from the organising committee were approved by the Executive⁽²¹⁾.

The proposals were put to a special Liberal convention in April. On most issues it was accepted British and Scottish Liberals were at one, and in general terms the statement of principles and aims was accepted. Additional proposals for the reform of fishing regulations were incorporated into official policy and there was some disagreement over education with some arguing that it should be compulsory for those out of work, who were between fourteen to sixteen years old. But there were fundamental divisions raised over the limits and extent of state control. One of the beaten candidates of 1924, Major Donaldson, argued that unless the party supported the miners' case for nationalisation the Liberals would have little credibility in industrial areas, and he proposed that

21 Scottish Liberal Association, Joint Organising Committee, January 13, 1925: Executive, February 10, 1925.

mining assets be nationalised with the right to work the assets leased out to private companies which would be obliged to involve miners in the management of the pits. His proposal was not accepted⁽²²⁾.

A major disagreement, however, later appeared on land reform, and this was to allow opponents to exploit Liberal differences. At the April conference the proposals for a Land Commission to encourage small holdings, and give tenure for smallholders, for tighter game laws, for the provision of allotments reached much less radical conclusions than the British Liberal Party had proposed⁽²³⁾.

It was Lloyd George who brought the land issue back on to the agenda when he visited the North of Scotland in the autumn of 1925, just after the detailed Liberal land proposals for Britain were published. His suggestions promoted the idea of resettlement and fixed rents but also nationalisation, a far more radical scheme than the Scottish policy. Lloyd George told a Highland audience in Inverness that there were 700,000 landless people, and that 'the landlord system was breaking down hopelessly...landowners could not meet their responsibility'. And if state help was needed, he said, 'the state required some more direct interest in the soil itself'⁽²⁴⁾. He was careful to add that he 'had not presumed to inquire into the Scottish conditions and that was a business for Scottish Liberals to undertake'⁽²⁵⁾.

But his remarks brought an angry and immediate reaction which gave the party great difficulties in the Galloway by-election then in progress. At their policy-making conference, the Liberal General

22 Glasgow Herald, April 5, 1925.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid., October 10, 1925.

25 Ibid.

Council had been adamant that land purchase must take second place to taxing land values, which it saw as the way out of the commercial and industrial depression. It had insisted that any treatment of the land question 'inconsistent with this emphasis would not have the support of Scottish Liberalism'. There were at once complaints that Lloyd George's land proposal had not even mentioned taxing land values, but it was left to Sir Henry Ballantyne to deliver the major indictment. Lloyd George's coal, power, and land programmes were, he feared, 'trying to enter into competition with the Labour Party', and he was near to supporting nationalisation⁽²⁶⁾. The support for Ballantyne was unanimous, Lloyd George backtracked, arguing in favour of a Scottish Committee to examine the issue, and saying when he toured the Borders:

I flung out my proposals as a challenge to people to think about their position. If anybody had a better scheme let him think it out and just as fearlessly tell it. (27)

The national land report and the land convention held in February 1926 considered land nationalisation. But Lloyd George had to accept that 'cultivating tenure' which was to be state owned was only to be established gradually as land came on the market and cultivating tenure was only one of many forms of land tenure.

26 Glasgow Herald, October 12, 1925. Ballantyne said, 'if they thought that by advocating policies of that kind they were going to get back some of their best radicals who had been driven out very largely because of the failure of the Liberal Party to go ahead with taxation of land values they would find themselves bitterly mistaken'.

27 Ibid., October 13, 1925.

According to McCallum Scott, writing in Forward, Lloyd George's land policy was in ruins: 'He has had to whittle it away by compromising concessions in the vain effort to conciliate implacable enemies' (28).

This suited the Scottish Liberals who formed their land enquiry committee only in June 1926 after meetings with both Lloyd George and Asquith. The committee in Scotland comprised Liberal landowners and farmers as well as smallholders and farm workers (29). While there is evidence of activity on the part of the Scottish Land Enquiry Committee (meetings for example with Lloyd George and Herbert Samuel in April 1927) (30) its report was slow to appear, taking almost two years to complete. A committee was set up to write a report by the autumn on rural land and a small committee of three to examine the Brown Book on urban land 'to see how far any of these (proposals) could be fitted in to Scottish conditions' (31). When eventually a report was ready and the officebearers of the party met the Executive of the Land Enquiry Committee there was dissatisfaction with relatively mild proposals on land nationalisation. Criticisms were made on the 'undue emphasis' on 'principles of purchase', and it was Sinclair who said 'the state at the present moment in Scotland were amongst the largest if not the largest landowners' and 'he undertook to

28 Forward, June 5, 1926.

29 Scottish Liberal Federation Executive, June 29, 1926.

30 Scottish Liberal Federation Executive, April 30, 1927.

31 Ibid., June 29, 1927.

see that the committee would do everything in their power to endeavour to tone down the question of purchase in the published report'. While some expressed 'entire satisfaction with regard to the report' there was even criticism of taxation of land values and 'the strong way it was referred to in the report'⁽³²⁾. When the report was eventually published in April 1928 just before the Linlithgow by-election, it did not appear to break much new ground. All tenants were to have security of tenure, and fair rents; there was to be a reform of game and deer land; and there was to be a land department. While the Scotsman acknowledged that the Scottish Liberals had refused to go as far as the English Green book, they spoke of the Liberals' 'faith in more machinery' as unacceptable⁽³³⁾.

Only the subject of education seemed to excite the same enthusiasm as land but again the Scottish Liberals offered no new departures in policy. An Education Committee was formed on the 9 December 1927⁽³⁴⁾, with a remit to cover 'universities, rural education, finance, nursery schools, the education of the adolescent, and juvenile employment'⁽³⁵⁾. While Principal Lawrie's statement of aims was grandiose, that 'one of the first objects of the Liberal Party has always been the development of education with a view to enabling every child to obtain the fullest moral, mental, and physical development without respect to class or social position,'

32 Scottish Liberal Federation Meeting of Land Committee with Officebearers, February 21, 1928.

33 Scotsman, April 5, 1928.

34 Scottish Liberal Federation, Education Committee, December 9, 1927.

35 Ibid., January 13, 1928.

the resulting measures were merely for training of unemployed juveniles and for more provision for rural education, public health education, and women's education; and it was agreed to look later at the school leaving age and technical, industrial, and commercial education⁽³⁶⁾.

The Scottish Executive were also asked to set up a fishery inquiry in the autumn of 1927 by Headquarters, and while it was set up, one candidate, Duncan Miller, wished it to be stated that this 'had not been neglected by Scottish Liberals'⁽³⁷⁾. The inquiry was supposed to report by February 1928 but the Executive was told in March that it was not at work. A small committee was also appointed to deal with urban land on the same basis as rural land, but by March 1928, 'it had never been able to get a quorum and their labours had practically ceased'⁽³⁸⁾.

Scottish Liberalism was hardly a vibrant intellectual force in its own right. Conferences of Scottish Liberals had to be postponed either through lack of prominent speakers or lack of support in Scotland⁽³⁹⁾. A focal point of Liberal discussion, the Liberal Summer School, which had been revived in 1925 fell into disrepute through lack of support. Great difficulty was found in attracting speakers and students for the schools and in 1925, as in subsequent years, it encountered financial difficulties⁽⁴⁰⁾. A special effort

36 Ibid., November 11, February 17, 1928.

37 Scottish Liberal Federation, Executive, October 17.

38 Ibid., March 6, 1928.

39 Scottish Liberal Federation Executive, September 9, 1926.

40 Ibid., Summer School Council, March 24, 1925, April 23, 1925, July 22, 1925, and September 19, 1925.

was made to revive activities in 1926. Liberal Associations were asked to send two representatives each and pay their expenses, with an ambitious programme planned on subjects, including proportional representation, Ireland, India and the dominions, temperance, social insurance, family allowances, and housing policy⁽⁴¹⁾. Samuel, Beveridge, and Ramsay Muir were asked to be speakers⁽⁴²⁾, but eventually only local figures were secured. The school was eventually postponed and even the organising committee, the Summer School Council, could not meet, because it was inquorate⁽⁴³⁾. Plans for 1927 were no more successful and an atmosphere of discouragement prevailed so that the Liberal Executive recognised the schools were virtually dead⁽⁴⁴⁾.

By-elections continued to go badly. After the defeat in Dundee, the failure in Ayr Burghs was a further embarrassment to the Liberals. The Conservative candidate, Moore, successfully made his fight one against Labour, arguing for social reform without socialism, on the grounds that 'the fight was against socialism'⁽⁴⁵⁾. There was no Liberal Party that he could attack. Pringle, the Liberal candidate, was severely handicapped by the state of local Liberal organisation⁽⁴⁶⁾, although the Liberals centrally threw their weight into the election and provided a constant stream of speakers and bands of canvassers⁽⁴⁷⁾. But in the end the Liberal revival, concluded the Glasgow Herald, was 'the vain imagination of Liberal orators'⁽⁴⁸⁾.

41 Ibid., November 25, 1925.

42 Ibid., May 7, 1926.

43 Ibid., April 17, 1927; April 25, 1927.

44 Ibid., June 14, 1928 and Federation Executive, September 7, 1928.

45 Glasgow Herald, June 11, 1925.

46 Ibid.

47 Scottish Liberal Federation, Eastern Committee, June 19, 1925.

48 Glasgow Herald, June 15, 1925. The result was: T Moore (Conservative) 11,601; P Dollan (Labour) 8,813; W Pringle (Liberal) 4,656.

The Galloway by-election of 1925 was a bigger disappointment since it had been a traditional Liberal seat. The Liberals had lost it in a straight fight in 1924 because of, they thought, 'inefficient campaigning arrangements',⁽⁴⁹⁾. But after the general election, a reorganisation had been set in motion, with a full-time organiser appointed, area associations reconstituted, and social rallies held to raise money. Dudgeon seemed a popular Liberal candidate. He was a former MP for the constituency and Chairman of the Stewartry Farmers' Union⁽⁵⁰⁾. The Liberals were ready for a by-election. In the first instance it was believed that Dudgeon, who had voted consistently with the Conservatives while in Parliament, might be left a free run by the Conservatives.

According to the Glasgow Herald's political correspondent, this was the 'moderate view' on the Conservative Advisory Committee, and 'Liberals would have been glad to have discussed the matter',⁽⁵¹⁾. But as in 1924 overtures were cut short with the sudden appearance of a Conservative candidate, a local farmer from Kirkcudbrightshire.

The Labour Party considered for some time whether or not to take part. While the local organisations wanted to fight, the Scottish Council was unhappy⁽⁵²⁾; after consultations the ILP chose a Lanarkshire miner as their candidate⁽⁵³⁾. Dudgeon during the campaign was to be embarrassed by Lloyd George's land proposals, which were, said his Conservative opponent, 'nationalisation in disguise'. It was obvious that the Liberal Party was 'by no means at unity within itself' and agreed on Lloyd George's new policy⁽⁵⁴⁾.

49 Glasgow Herald, October 9, 1925.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid., October 12, 1925.

52 Ibid., October 10, 1925.

53 Ibid., October 13, 1925.

54 Ibid., October 15, 1925.

But on a high poll (83% compared with 77% at the General Election) Labour's intervention was sufficient to allow the Conservative to retain the seat. What ought to have been a by-election victory for the Liberals turned out to be 'extremely disappointing' for Liberals⁽⁵⁵⁾, despite the popularity of their candidate. While Dudgeon claimed that the cut of one third in the Conservative majority was evidence of a revival⁽⁵⁶⁾, Liberalism clearly had a long way to go.

In 1926 the Conservatives won Dunbartonshire and East Renfrew in January, and Bothwell was won by Labour in March 1926. In East Renfrew the Liberals were unable to find a candidate to place in the field. In Dunbartonshire, the Liberal selection committee also decided not to fight 'having been unable to secure the services of a candidate, a prominent or local liberal'⁽⁵⁷⁾. However, a group of local Liberals unofficially agreed to put forward the radical lawyer, Reid, the Secretary of the Scottish League for the Taxation of Land Values. The Chairman of the campaign was given the use of Liberal Association funds and had to say: 'we ourselves are the machinery. Dunbartonshire is not so well organised as they should be'⁽⁵⁸⁾. In explaining his defeat Reid said:

It was the timidity of members of my own party that let me down. My opinion is that Mr Martin, the Labour candidate, received as many Liberal votes as the Conservative did. The effect of the refusal to fight at the last election and the hesitation in the beginning of this occasion has been to send a proportion of Liberals into other camps...it was not so much political opponents whom I had to fight as the unhappy situation of the demoralisation of Liberalism at the moment. (59)

55 Ibid., November 19, 1925.

56 Ibid., November 20, 1925. The result was S Streatfield (Conservative) 10,846; C Dudgeon (Liberal) 9,918; J Mitchell (Labour) 4,903.

57 Ibid., January 7, 1926

58 Ibid., January 12, 1926.

59 Ibid., January 22, 1926.

Dunbartonshire Liberals then decided not to accept an invitation to hold the Scottish conference there⁽⁶⁰⁾.

The Liberals did no better in Bothwell where the candidate was pushed into the field and argued that he 'never anticipated he would get much support in such a by-election but he wanted to keep up the Liberal influence'⁽⁶¹⁾.

Bothwell produced a second lost deposit for the Liberals. At the Scottish Executive, Major Donaldson spoke of 'the deplorable state of local organisation in Bothwell'. He suggested that if in future party headquarters wanted constituencies to fight by-elections in difficult seats, it must provide properly qualified agents and see that campaigns were efficiently run in every way possible⁽⁶²⁾.

Lloyd George's accession to control over the party came in stages. But his aim was to turn the party into an electoral machine as impressive as that of other parties. Where the 'Million pound' fund failed, Lloyd George hoped to succeed, and to push Liberal Associations into raising money to support candidates. In the years after the 1924 election, the party in Scotland faced large financial difficulties and these were only partly resolved by Lloyd George's money. Constituency organisation was so poor that in 1926 the Eastern Organisation Committee was told by the organiser that he had discontinued his visit to the constituencies⁽⁶³⁾. Over the whole country it had been stated earlier there was 'want of

60 Scottish Liberal Federation, Executive, June 29, 1926. The result was J Thom (Conservative) 12,680; W Martin (Labour) 11,610; W Reid (Liberal) 2,146.

61 Scotsman, March 29, 1926.

62 Scottish Liberal Federation Executive, March 31, 1926. The result was J Sullivan (Labour) 14,830; A Mackay (Conservative) 8,740; E Young (Liberal) 1,276.

63 Scottish Liberal Federation, Eastern Organising Committee, September 23, 1926.

interest' in Liberal organisations in about two-thirds of the constituences⁽⁶⁴⁾. In the East of Scotland subscribers, who had numbered 1200 in 1914 had fallen to just over five hundred (505) in 1923-24 and 481 by 1925, while in the West 'a special effort to increase their contributions' failed to arrest their decline⁽⁶⁵⁾.

By 1926 the position was even worse, for although in the East there had been an increase of 125 subscriptions, the Federation's expenditure was 'about double the normal income'. Its credit balance would only last till the end of the year and a special appeal was launched but in a spirit of pessimism⁽⁶⁶⁾.

Especially given its own financial weakness, the Federation had little option but to accept Lloyd George's terms for support. These were agreed by 28 votes to 2 in January 1927 but left the Federation extremely unhappy at the virtual loss of financial independence. Webster, its representative on the National Administrative Committee, which had hammered out the arrangements, offered to resign⁽⁶⁷⁾, but in the end the terms were accepted although only with an explicit statement that they would 'endanger the independence of the party'. This meant that headquarters' money continued to be available to fight by-elections in Scotland⁽⁶⁸⁾.

64 Ibid., Eastern Finance Committee, May 7, 1925.

65 Eastern Finance Committee, 7 May, 1925.

66 Ibid., May 20, 1926. By September the situation was no better, as the Committee was told, "the industrial troubles and the party troubles made it almost impossible to approach men or women for party contributions. He was by no means despondent about the future but until men and women saw good reasons why they should subscribe to the party, very little if any headway could be made and he expressed the hope that after Lord Oxford's pronouncement in Greenock the air might be cleared".

67 Meeting of Officebearers, January 21, 1927.

68 Scottish Liberal Federation, Executive, February 24, 1927.

It did nothing however to relieve the Federation's own poverty, which was worsened by the loss of subscribers. The number of subscriptions had in fact halved since 1918 and the party was dependent on special donations⁽⁶⁹⁾.

A first test for Lloyd George came with the Leith by-election in March 1927. Lloyd George's aggressive Liberalism made it difficult for any coalition behind a 'moderate' candidate to face Labour. In the event, after what Forward described as 'reluctance on the part of prominent Liberals without a seat in parliament' to come forward, the Liberals chose Ernest Brown, and the Conservatives, Beaton⁽⁷⁰⁾. The Conservatives, however, were anxious to minimise the divide between Liberalism and Unionism. 'The only difference', it was claimed, between the two parties was over the taxing land values, free trade, and self government, and 'apart from that the Liberal candidate's policy was that of the Conservative Government',⁽⁷¹⁾.

Since the election had been caused by the defection of the sitting Liberal MP, the victory was described as 'the torch of the revival of Liberalism', by Sir Robert Hutchison and as 'the new impulse to Liberalism throughout the land', by Lloyd George⁽⁷²⁾. But the

69 Ibid., February 24, 1927. See also Scottish Liberal Association Joint Finance Committee, June 7, 1927. The party heard that 'up to 1918 the income of the federation was made up entirely of subscriptions and the subscribers in these days numbered over 2,000 whereas in the later years a very large proportion of the income was made up of special donations, the subscriptions not meeting the expenditure and the subscribers had dropped to less than half'.

70 Forward, March 12, 1927.

71 Scotsman, March 17, 1927.

72 Ibid., March 25, 1927.

Liberals benefited from two things, firstly, from the extremism of the Labour candidate, exploited by the Conservatives and Liberals alike, and used by MacDonald as the explanation for Labour defeat, and, secondly, from the defection of Unionists to Liberals to avoid a Labour victory, the second being more important. The Labour candidate, Wilson, claimed that the Liberals won the seat by the defection of 3,000 Conservative votes. The beaten Conservative candidate was clear that the Liberal victor had to 'thank at least five thousand Conservatives for returning him'. He continued that:

There were Conservatives who thought that in order to defeat socialism it was better to have a half-baked defender of private enterprise and therefore they voted for Mr Brown...There was another point of view that ought to be kept in mind. If their Liberal friends were going to make a point of pleading for united support for the candidate of private enterprise, who was most likely to defeat socialism, they must recognise that the Unionists were going to keep what they had at the present time, the majority of the seats in Scotland. Because the Liberals held that seat through conservatives voting Liberal to keep the socialists out, in all the other industrial seats the Unionists held at the present time the Liberals would require to vote conservative in order to keep the socialists out. (73)

This was the Liberal problem. To rely on Unionist votes to win was merely a policy of protecting the few seats they had.

But with the impetus of Leith, new organisers were employed to create electoral machines in the constituencies. As Colonel Tweed told the Federation's officebearers at a meeting on 1 September 1927, 'London insisted upon the £4000 being spend upon what they described as new work but which was ultimately construed as being work of organisation in the constituencies'⁽⁷⁴⁾. By November 1927, 13 of the East constituencies were still without candidates, the

73 Ibid.

74 Scottish Liberal Federation, Officebearers Meeting, September 1, 1927.

Eastern Organiser, McNicol, reported, and constituencies that required special work included former strongholds such as East Aberdeenshire, Dunfermline, Kirkcaldy, North Midlothian, West Lothian and East Edinburgh. There was also concern that 'the Borders had been neglected'⁽⁷⁵⁾. A later report on the state of these constituencies in December spoke of 'peculiar difficulties' in Dunfermline and a shortage of money in others⁽⁷⁶⁾.

The Central Organising Committee in January 1928 was told of meetings and visits to 23 constituencies. In eighteen constituencies the General Secretary had met candidate's committees (13 in West) and found that 'the real difficulty was in getting the candidates who were willing to stand to take constituencies in the west of Scotland'. Webster reported:

The staff were finding certain difficulties in reorganising constituencies that were more or less derelict. While the constituencies were willing to reorganise they were unable to do so for want of funds and in some cases they were in debt...it was a very delicate question especially in the west of Scotland to pick out the type of constituency as it really meant, if a grant was to be given, that they should be fought. (77)

An examination of likely constituencies was agreed. Candidates were chosen in Dundee and North Aberdeen. Perthshire and North Midlothian applied for assistance and work was continued in Berwick, Fife, and Aberdeen. A list of 'derelict constituencies' for whom grants would be advised was to be submitted⁽⁷⁸⁾. By

75 Scottish Liberal Federation, Eastern Organising Committee, November 3, 1927.

76 Central Organising Committee, January 20, 1928.

77 Central Organising Committee, January 30, 1928.

78 Ibid.

March, the Central Organising Committee found, candidates were adopted in North Aberdeen, North Edinburgh, North Lanark, Motherwell, Coatbridge, and Cathcart. Paisley were practically fixed up, constituencies in touch with candidates included Kilmarnock, Clydebank, Dumbarton Burghs, and Ayr. In all, practically 26 candidates were 'fixed'. The list of 'semi-derelict constitutencies' was sent to London, with a recommendation that headquarters give a £50 grant to each. Webster also advised an honorarium for part-time organisers with a grant for propaganda.

By March 1928 there were 30 candidates⁽⁷⁹⁾, and shortly afterwards 33 candidates⁽⁸⁰⁾. In May there were 36, by June⁽⁸¹⁾ the number had declined again to 33. Four others were considering. A memorandum from headquarters suggested conferences in difficult areas to help constituencies but it was felt the proposal would be a little dangerous in Glasgow and 'unnecessary in Edinburgh'. However, the Eastern Committee⁽⁸²⁾ decided that meetings should be held all over Scotland in the early autumn, 'stirring up interest in view of the approaching general election'⁽⁸³⁾ and a conference was held in Glasgow 'to review the whole position'⁽⁸⁴⁾. But the increased pace did not satisfy headquarters. In December Samuel

79 Scottish Liberal Federation, Central Organising Committee, March 2, 1928.

80 SLF Executive, March 6, 1928.

81 Executive, 22 June 1928. Two had fallen out, Pringle ? , Kennock withdrawing by July (Special meeting, Central Organising Committee) but West Lothian selected Orr (27 July 1928).

82 SLF Central Organising Committee, June 27, 1928.

83 SLF Eastern Committee, June 6, 1928.

84 SLF Central Organising Committee, October 3, 1928.

was writing asking Scotland 'to speed up the adoption of Liberal candidates', to which Webster replied that he was 'making every effort...the difficulty was to get proper adjustment between constituencies and individual candidates'. There were now 32 candidates in the field, although others were possible in five other constituencies, Argyll, Paisley, Maryhill, Berwick and Haddington, and Kilmarnock. When the Executive asked for 'quicker progress',⁽⁸⁵⁾ Webster said he found 'the real difficulty was to get the type of candidate who was acceptable',⁽⁸⁶⁾ In January 1929, with an election imminent only 10 of the 38 western constituencies had Liberals contrasted with 36 each of Labour and Conservative⁽⁸⁷⁾.

Samuel's pressure on Scotland was maintained. Writing in February, 1929, he spoke of 'regret that the Scottish position with regard to organisation, candidates, and propaganda was not so satisfactory as any of the other areas in England', and that 'staffs were not functioning as they ought to function except one',⁽⁸⁸⁾ While there were new candidates in Kilmarnock, Berwick, Forfarshire, Kelvingrove, and Argyll, making 37 in all and there were two or three other constituencies 'in touch with possible men' Webster advised that at best there might be 40 candidates at the election. Scotland's quota under the national mean to field 500 Liberal candidates, was 48 and it seemed impossible to reach this figure. Webster felt this was 'the most important grievance London has had with Scotland. He insisted, however that, 'the seriousness of the

85 SLF Central Organising Committee, December 7, 1928.

86 Ibid., October 3, 1928.

87 Glasgow Herald, January 31, 1929.

88 SLF Central Organising Committee, February 27, 1929.

situation was as well known in Scotland as in London'. Constituencies who were adopting candidates were finding finances a problem. Forfarshire for example 'felt they could not fight the election on the grant given on working and raising money unless they were going to get a candidate', and Webster 'knew of no one that they were likely to accept'⁽⁸⁹⁾. However, by April 1929, the number of candidates had in fact been raised from 37 to 43 with others 'possible' in spite of possible financial problems in many constituencies⁽⁹⁰⁾. Even so by this time the Conservatives had 64 and Labour 62 candidates in the field⁽⁹¹⁾.

In 1925 it had been a Liberal dream to have a candidate in every constituency of Scotland. Lloyd George in 1926 promised five hundred candidates for the United Kingdom and in the 1929 election the Liberals actually fielded 512 candidates. But in Scotland the party managed only 45. In Glasgow Liberals were absent in 11 of the 15 seats, and the party's strength was concentrated in the rural areas.

89 Ibid.

90 Ibid,, April 23, 1929.

91 Glasgow Herald, April 22, 1929.

II THE NEW CONSERVATISM?

Between 1924 and 1929 the Conservative Party became a modern political party in Scotland : to its anti-socialism was added a positive social policy. This does not mean that the work of propaganda, organisation, and education against socialism did not continue unabated. It did, through classes, speakers, lectures, publications, and most of all leaflets. But the Conservative Party also adjusted itself while in government to putting forward a policy on economic and social affairs. In the late twenties the Conservative Party was able for the first time in Scotland to act as a party of Government, working out policy, defending its leaders and organising for electoral victory. Prior to that it had all the features of a movement against socialism. The transition was aided by the change that was taking place in the Labour Party, as the revolutionary left was pushed out and the ILP radicals defeated.

There appears to have been a consolidation rather than improvement in party membership and financing. While membership rose from 20,000 in 1922 to 39,000 in 1929, subscriptions (for example, those to the Glasgow Unionist Association) remained relatively stable⁽¹⁾. The Western Divisional Council retained rather than expanded its speakers and employees. In January 1925, it had 5 men and one woman speaker⁽²⁾ who in all in 1925 addressed 800 meetings. By using additional speakers, 1461 meetings were held⁽³⁾. The Eastern Divisional Council was far less well-organised. Publications took precedence over organisation. Indeed in 1926 there was dissatisfaction expressed at the Central Organisation in the East.

1 Scottish Unionist Association, Papers of Joint Executive Committee, Subscription list.

2 SUA Western Divisional Council, January 8, 1925.

3 Ibid., January 6, 1926.

A questionnaire on the organisation of constituencies met with little response⁽⁴⁾. One delegate at an area group meeting called to improve co-ordination complained 'nothing was ever done and it was a waste of time attending council meetings'⁽⁵⁾. However, most constituencies had an organiser⁽⁶⁾. Only in a few like Caithness was organisation poor or non-existent, and in places like East Aberdeenshire, Banffshire and Ross and Cromarty and Montrose, where organisations seemed capable of improvement, special action was considered. In 1927, the East launched 'a scheme of work' to 'arouse interest in the constituencies between now and the General Election', which included speakers' classes and rallies in each constituency⁽⁷⁾. Finance remained a problem for the east and indeed throughout Scotland. Proposals to introduce a constituency affiliation fee were beaten back by the Chairman and agent, Colonel Blair. A minimum of £5.5s. had been suggested but Blair preferred informal pressure to raise money for central organisations to formal constitutional provisions⁽⁹⁾.

There were full-time organisers in 50 of 70 constituencies in 1925 according to the Annual reports of 1925⁽¹⁰⁾. Even so the council

4 SUA Eastern Divisional Council, Executive, April 22, 1925.

5 Ibid., February 16, 1926.

6 Ibid., February 27, 1927.

7 SUA Eastern Divisional Council, July 27, 1927.

9 Ibid., July 28, 1928.

10 SUA Central Council Report, 1925, p.5.

wanted organisers in every seat, stressing 'the vital necessity of making good this defect with the least possible delay'. In the west 26 of the 34 constituencies had full-time organisers. In Glasgow in 1925, organisers were absent only in Cathcart and Govan.⁽¹¹⁾ In the east's 33 constituencies there were 24 men organisers, with women organisers, also in 7⁽¹²⁾.

In 1926 the official reports spoke of 'a general and marked improvement in the organisation throughout the whole country'. By then only six constituencies were without organisers. In the east in addition there was a 'missioner' at the disposal of constituencies⁽¹³⁾. Even then a special committee had been formed to examine organisation and promote new schemes⁽¹⁴⁾, and more organisers were being pressed for. In 1927 organisation had been 'fully maintained' although 11 constituencies were without full-time organisers - 4 in the east (Orkney, Western Isles, Caithness, and Central Edinburgh), with three omissions - Banff, Kirkcaldy, and Inverness-shire - now rectified. By 1928, the east had 28 men organisers with 8 women out of 32, with only Orkney, Central Edinburgh, Western Isles, and North Aberdeen without organisers. In the West only Cathcart, Shettleston, Springburn, Paisley, Bothwell, and Motherwell were without organisers⁽¹⁵⁾. By 1930, there were

11 Glasgow Unionist Association, Annual Report, January 26, 1926.

12 SUA Central Council Report, 1925, p.10., p.16.

13 SUA Central Council Report, 1926, p.9.

14 Ibid.

15 SUA Central Council Report, 1928, p.16.

still 28 men in the west of Scotland and with now 25 men and 12 women organisers in East, only seven seats were without organisers (Orkney, Western Isles, Caithness, Ross and Cromarty, North Aberdeen, Montrose, and Dunfermline)⁽¹⁶⁾. It can be assumed where there was no organiser there was little organisation. Constituencies such as Ross and Cromarty, the Western Isles, Orkney and Shetland, Caithness, and Montrose were almost invariably without organisers during the whole period, and this reflected an absence of activity which allowed the seats to remain in Liberal hands for most of the time⁽¹⁷⁾.

Various organisations were encouraged as vehicles of conservatism in action. The Junior Imperialist League was so successful in the west of Scotland that the number of branches had jumped to nearly 100 by December 1925⁽¹⁸⁾. The East tried to repeat the success of the West and from a survey they found that 11 constituencies either had branches or were on their way to setting them up, and by 1929 90 Junior Associations with 7000 members existed in the whole of Scotland. Colonel Blair, the Unionist Agent, still felt nevertheless that there was room for further improvement⁽¹⁹⁾. The progress of this Junior League was to be a repeated interest of the Eastern Committee⁽²⁰⁾.

16 Ibid.

17 SUA Eastern Divisional Council, April 28, 1926, June 24, 1925. For example organisation was non-existent in Caithness and schemes of improvement had to be drawn up for Banff, East Aberdeen and Ross and Cromarty constituencies. In Montrose Lady Baxter recommended that 'if at all possible headquarters should be allowed to run a candidate as otherwise nothing would be done'. 'EDC June 24, 1925).

18 SUA Western Divisional Council, December 2, 1925.

19 SUA Eastern Divisional Council, January 22, 1930. See also October 28, and December 18, 1925.

20 Scottish SUA, Central Committee, Report, 1929, p.11.

When Colonel Blair - the Unionist agent in Scotland - carried out his own personal enquiry into the state of Unionist organisation after the 1929 election, he was to acknowledge that much had been achieved in improving Unionist organisation, through making literature available, organising meetings, and raising money. But he believed that Conservative local organisation was still insufficiently flexible. Socialists, he found, did 'far more unpaid work' especially in canvassing, and Blair felt that 'efforts spent in this direction...would be more valuable than the holding, for example, of conferences which pass resolution, upon political questions'. He was unhappy that so much of Conservative organisation was in the hands of lawyers. 'The personal touch' was needed. He also wanted to expand the existing number of subscribers on the grounds that 'a large number of small subscribers is far more valuable than a small number of large subscribers'. He finally wanted to make the party publications both 'more ambitious' and more appropriate and applicable to Scotland⁽²¹⁾. Between 1924 and 1929 the Scottish Conservatives had gone a long way to creating a modern party organisation but they still recognised they had a long way to go.

The more positive side of Scottish Conservatism was a greater attention to the detail of policy. There was still a broad anti-socialist crusade and a distaste, especially in the East, for any criticism of the leadership of the party, but the Conservatives did try to anticipate the problems their government faced and did try to press for a more constructive conservatism. In particular they moved towards a commitment to 'sound, progressive, constructive policy of social reform',⁽²²⁾ although the verdict of the election in 1929 was felt to show that the party had not yet committed itself firmly enough to this course. Policy-making varied from the support of positive measures of social reform to demands for economies in public expenditure, and for strong action

21 SUA Report by Colonel Blair on 1929 General Election, Gilmour Papers GD/383

22 SUA Scottish Conference Report, 1929, p.5-6.

against trade unions and in favour of protection. Immediately after the 1924 election the Scottish Conservatives put forward their most coherent set of policy proposals of the decade, urging one comprehensive national insurance scheme to achieve better social conditions, new housing schemes for both urban and rural areas, a reform of the rating systems, and an enquiry into the cost of food. This offered support for even more ambitious social reform than the Conservative Government's Housing and Health Ministry under Neville Chamberlain or the Scottish Office was promising. The issue which the Scottish Party was especially concerned about was housing. Their attitudes represented a development of the concern they had shown before 1924 when they had advised against the decontrol of rents. In 1925, they expressed support for the Scottish Secretary's housing efforts, 'being deeply concerned at the urgency of the housing problem'⁽²³⁾. In 1926 they wanted action 'to concentrate for the present on the provision of houses of a class most suitable to clear these evils (slum and overcrowding) from our midst'⁽²⁴⁾. By 1927 they could record 'gratification at the increased progress being made in Scotland during the administration of the present government in the decrease in the shortage of housing for the people'⁽²⁵⁾. But in 1928 they urged that slum clearance be pushed forward⁽²⁶⁾. The wisdom of further progress seemed to be confirmed by events, since they felt that at the 1929 election the government's record had been harmed 'by the undoubted fact that in spite of all efforts houses were still too dear for the poor working people'⁽²⁷⁾.

23 SUA Central Conference, November 13, 1925.

24 Ibid., November 11, 1926.

25 Ibid., November 3, 1927.

26 Ibid., November 22, 1928.

27 SUA Scottish Conference Report, 1929, p.9.

The other plank of social reform was contributory pensions and insurance. In 1926, the party in Scotland urged 'an improved system of old age pensions on a contributory basis while preserving the rights of old age pensions under the present scheme' with sickness and unemployment insurance overhauled and provision made for women and children⁽²⁸⁾. They welcomed the 1925 pensions act but not without reservations, and they felt it still left 'certain injustices to be rectified', which the Government should quickly deal with⁽²⁹⁾. And again, in 1929 they were to record that support had been lost because, of 'the carefully fostered grievances of those who just fell outside the new old age and widows' pensions' benefits'. They regretted the failure to issue any definite statement of policy on this matter.

A more negative aspect of policy was their concern for spending cuts. In 1927 as the Conservative Party moved to the right in the wake of the general strike, they resolved 'that this conference is of the opinion that excessive high taxes and rates are still the chief obstacle to recovery, that the widespread discontent consequent thereupon gravely prejudices the prospects of Unionists at the next general election, and that therefore relentless economy and a reduction of national expenditure are the prime duties of His Majesty's Government'⁽³⁰⁾. Early in 1927 the Western Council wished to approve a list of drastic cuts but Blair warned against being too explicit about particular reductions in spending.

In fact concern about spending came to a head during the miners' strike, when Gilmour and Elliot at the Scottish Office were hauled over the coals, so to speak, for allowing the illegal payment of poor law assistance to strikers. These payments were made

. . .
28 SUA Scottish Conference, 1924, November 13, 1924.

29 Annual Conference, Scottish Unionist Association, Minute, November 12, 1926.

retrospectively legal against the wishes of the western conservatives. Propaganda work, the Conservative Western Council was told, had been 'severely impeded by the dissatisfaction which existed because... of the enormous expenditure of parish councils under the authority of the Scottish Board of Health...it involves an almost intolerable burden upon the ratepayers'⁽³¹⁾. Elliot tried to reassure the Conservatives that the Parish Councils were under an obligation to 'give food to any starving person', but the Executive asked for 'an immediate enquiry' despite his reassurances. While the matter was under Cabinet discussion, the Council argued that the payments 'alienated the sympathy of many of the party's supporters', and unanimously offered their 'considered opinion that it would be extremely inexpedient to introduce legislation for the purpose of legalising what the courts have decided to be an illegal act'.

Unemployment, however, was an important concern of the Scottish Conservatives, with support for more interventionist policies than the Government was pursuing. They had wanted to go further than Baldwin in 1924 when he rejected protectionist tariffs for safeguarding industries, although they refused to rock the boat, and merely asked for 'more education on empire trade and imperial preference'⁽³²⁾. But in 1925 they were demanding that the Government 'take immediate steps for the further protection of the work and wages of our people from foreign competition',⁽³³⁾ and

30 Ibid., November 3.

31 Propaganda Committee, September 1, 1926.

32 SUA Scottish Conference, 1924, November 13, 1924.

33 Ibid., 1925, November 13, 1925.

they asked for a simplification of procedures for help under the safeguarding of Industries Act. While the Executive had accepted for consideration a motion drawing attention to underconsumption as a reason for the economic slump, and calling for a 'bold policy upon Empire development', it could not be discussed as conference ran out of time⁽³⁴⁾. At the 1927 Conference a motion accepting there was to be no general tariff but calling for more protection against unfair competition was dropped in favour of a milder resolution to extend the safeguarding of industry act⁽³⁵⁾. The Government's response was welcomed⁽³⁶⁾. But in the wake of the 1929 election defeat, the Executive offered the unanimous advice that Baldwin 'should at an early date make a declaration that we would ask the electors' authority at the general election not only to call an imperial conference but to put its decision into immediate effect, even should these measures include duties on foreign foodstuffs',⁽³⁷⁾.

Behind support for protectionism was a concern about reviving of the economy - and the social disorders that would result from high unemployment. The 1925 conference went so far as to talk of 'the large and deplorable amount of unemployment' and to record its 'earnest hope that no stone would be left unturned by the government to remedy this evil',⁽³⁸⁾. They went on to stress that unemployment was a 'matter for national industrial policy', rather than simply a localised problem which awaited the revival of the market through the invisible hand. The 1926 Conference proposed that there should be more local representation on Ministry of Labour Committees⁽³⁹⁾.

34 Ibid., November 12, 1926.

35 Ibid., November 3, 1927.

36 Ibid., November 22, 1928..

37 SUA Central Executive, September 10, 1930.

38 SUA Conference, July 25, 1925.

39 Ibid. November 12, 1926.

The 1927 one discussed emigration as a means of reducing unemployment. Their proposals spoke of a 'temporary state of overpopulation' and suggested that higher emigration be encouraged with money from the Unemployment Insurance Fund used to bring men into agricultural work and to advance capital to suitable emigrants⁽⁴⁰⁾.

The Unionists however did not deviate from their concern over 'extremism' and its manifestations in industrial militancy. In 1925, and before the General Strike, the issue of trade union reform was already the subject of discussion amongst Conservatives in the west of Scotland. There had been calls to end the legal immunities granted to trade unions under the 1906 Act, and the private member's bill, introduced by McQuisten, himself a west of Scotland MP, which sought to change the basis of the political levy from contracting out to contracting in, produced a considerable debate. When the Council canvassed the views of local constituency Chairmen, they found ten favoured the proposed legislation and twenty-nine were against⁽⁴¹⁾. The Council thus accepted the Scottish Unionist Agent's advice that 'if the question was better understood trade unionists would take up the matter for themselves', and issued a leaflet explaining how to contract out⁽⁴²⁾. While resisting calls for an end to immunity, the Council wanted changes in the law 'with a view to preventing intimidation and to enable the members of trade unions to have the opportunity of fully expressing their opinion'⁽⁴³⁾.

40 Ibid., November 3, 1927.

41 SUA Western Divisional Council March 14, 1925.

42 Ibid., September 2, 1925.

43 Ibid., November 13, 1925.

Throughout the year they expressed concern at 'the scope given to extremists' and had to be reassured that 'the government was not blind to what was going on', and would take action when the time was opportune⁽⁴⁴⁾. When it was proposed that the matter of secret ballots, and 'communistic activities' be raised with the Prime Minister, the Council agreed to await Baldwin's speech at the party conference in October⁽⁴⁵⁾. But following the Conference, the Western Divisional Chairman confessed he 'did not feel confident that the Government would tackle any of these subjects, (trade disputes, peaceful picketing, and the secret ballot), as the council would like and that organisations must just keep pressing for the desired reforms'⁽⁴⁶⁾.

Support for a more repressive anti-socialist policy was grounded in the assumption that voters and workers were being indoctrinated and misled by agitators. Support for trade union reform did not prevent Conservatives supporting trade unions if properly led, and behind the view of the Western Council was the assumption that if ballots were held before strikes and if union leaders were controlled, then stability would ensue. It was in part an extension of the policy of propaganda against the socialist and extremist menace. The western divisional council became so worried in 1926 that they demanded deportation as a solution. A motion was passed in September asking the government to suppress revolutionary talk and conduct⁽⁴⁷⁾, at both indoor and outdoor meetings.

44 Ibid., October 7, 1925.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., November 4, 1925.

47 SUA Western Divisional Council, September 22, 1926.

While Conservatives believed in organised preparations against the General Strike, the matter was regarded as too sensitive for the Party to place itself at the disposal of the government. Both the Western Convener and Sir Charles Cleland warned that 'it was not desirable to take part as a party organisation'⁽⁴⁸⁾. During the strike they had to suspend their open-air meetings and a procession of young Unionists planned in Glasgow in view of the hostile attitude of strikers⁽⁴⁹⁾. In the East they recognised that literature in mining areas would have to be distributed by post⁽⁵⁰⁾, and a leaflet was sent out explaining 'Miners' Wages and Coal Prices', after they were urged to continue leafleting by the Unionist Whip⁽⁵¹⁾. Immediately after the strike, the Western Council urged 'an early and authoritative enquiry into the operation of the law affecting trade unions and into the method which might be adopted to remedy any defects'. They wanted in particular an obligation to have secret ballots before strikes⁽⁵²⁾. At the Scottish Conference, motions were passed to make strikes illegal without secret ballots, to make mass picketing illegal, and to ensure that trade unions were forced to accept full responsibility for actions by their officials and members. There was also a proposal to give the right to request a ballot 'in any matter affecting his work' but it was dropped in favour of a more general statement that present laws 'constitute a menace to national security while depriving the individual of political and industrial freedom', warning of 'the danger of hasty and precipitate action', and urging legislation 'to restore the political and industrial freedom of individual trade

48 SUA Western Divisional Council, May 5, 1926.

49 Ibid.

50 SUA Eastern Executive, May 28, 1926.

51 Ibid., June 23, 1926.

52 SUA Western Divisional Council, June 2, 1926.

unionists and to safeguard the nation against the danger of trade unions being exploited for political purposes',⁽⁵³⁾. In 1927 the Western Council issued a leaflet to show the 'futility of strikes and the importance of means being adopted for the peaceful settlement of disputes',⁽⁵⁴⁾. There was naturally support for the trades disputes bill, and 200,000 leaflets were distributed to explain it⁽⁵⁵⁾. On the political levy, a leaflet was issued with the title 'Don't Sign',⁽⁵⁶⁾. Support was also eventually expressed for an industrial peace conference to 'reduce to a minimum the possibility of industrial conflicts such as have proved so disastrous in the past'.

The new policy-making interests of Scottish Unionists made them complain at times that the Conservative Government had no policy that was sufficiently positive to win support. This was hardly fair to the Scottish Office, however, and by the time of the 1929 election considerable changes had taken place both in the Conservative Party and the Conservative Government in Scotland. In 1924 Gilmour's elevation to Scottish Secretary had been regarded as a victory for the progressives. The Duke of Atholl wrote that 'we ought to be able to have a real forward Scottish programme', especially if Elliot was second in command. Sinclair, the Liberal member, wrote 'no possible appointment by your party could have given as much satisfaction to me personally or, I believe, to most Liberals in the Highlands',⁽⁵⁷⁾. Even Rosslyn Mitchell, admittedly

53 SUA Scottish Conference, November 12, 1926.

54 SUA Western Divisional Council Propaganda Committee, January 5, 1927.

55 Ibid., April 4, May 5, 1927.

56 Propaganda Committee, September 9, 1927.

57 Sinclair to Gilmour, Gilmour Papers, November 12, 1924. GD/383/20.

unpopular with his Labour colleagues, told Gilmour that he believed the rigidity of party divisions was slackening:

You Tories - if I may still call you that when your actions so little resemble the Toryism of my youth - are doing some splendid things. You are making it very difficult for an opposition to function at all. (58)

While the emphasis of election manifestoes in 1924 was the failure of Labour, the Russian menace, and 'the socialist bolshevist bankrupt state' Labour would create, as Gilmour put it, Conservatives also promised slum clearance, new housebuilding, improved contributory insurance and pensions, and security of tenancies when rent restriction lapsed in June 1925⁽⁵⁹⁾. In 1929 Conservatives claimed they had quadrupled the output of new houses - from just over 4,000 a year in 1924 to 20,000 in 1929 -and carried out slum clearance. 'No problem', Gilmour stated 'has been more energetically tackled by the Government.' Conservatives also claimed that through local government reform the health services were improving, and that nearly 200,000 Scots were benefiting from the new widows' and old age pensions⁽⁶⁰⁾.

After the 1929 election, Blair believed that, despite Gilmour's position, the Government's achievements had been misrepresented or misunderstood and that the Government had been blamed for poor housing and unemployment. He felt that the party might have relied too much upon 'past achievements' and had lacked a 'definite and attractive future policy which could be grasped by the electorate'. Defeat naturally produced what the Annual Report of 1929 called 'a clamour for more spectacular action'. A large number of the rank

58 Mitchell to Gilmour, n.d. GD/383/20.

59 Gilmour Election Address, 1924, GD/383/11.

60 Gilmour Election Address, 1929, GD/383/15.

and file agreed with Blair that the party 'had suffered through not having a definite policy for the future' and these feelings expressed themselves at the 1929 Scottish Conference although it was pointed out they came near to being a vote of censure on the leaders⁽⁶¹⁾. Nevertheless by 1929 the Conservative Party had changed substantially since 1924. It was a different Conservative as well as Labour Party which fought the election.

61 SUA Report by Blair, Gilmour Correspondence, July 12, 1919.
GD/383/29.

CHAPTER 9

THE 1929 ELECTION

1929 marks Labour's accession to power as the largest party in Britain but without a majority over all the other parties in Parliament. In Scotland Labour's position was even better : with a majority of seats Labour would have gained power in an independent Scottish parliament. But the steps to the victory of 1929 were difficult ones, involving changes in the Labour Party in Scotland, and changes in the alignment of Conservative and Liberal opponents. In the conflicts of the period 1924 to 1929, the Labour Party in Scotland had shed much of its leftward stance and the Conservative Party had committed itself more positively to a policy of social reform as a complement to its anti-socialist crusade.

The two by-elections which opened in 1929 showed what was to be the shape of the general election results to come : Liberalism caught between Conservative and Labour. In Midlothian, the Liberal who could manage less than half the vote of the Conservative and Labour candidates ensured nevertheless a Labour victory. Churchill argued:

It seems extraordinary that the Lloyd George fund, which was built up for the direct purpose of enabling the Conservatives and Liberals to stand up against socialism, should be used with the consequence of deliberately multiplying socialist representation in the House of Commons. (1)

So far as issues were concerned, Clarke, the Labour candidate, had argued for nationalising the mines, and the Conservative candidate, a businessman, Colville, had wanted protection and derating, and had been prepared to support employment schemes such as building a Forth Road bridge⁽²⁾.

1 Glasgow Herald, February 13, 1929.

2 Ibid., 12 January, 1929.

Similarly, the Liberals were squeezed in North Lanark. They had had no candidate when the by-election was declared because of the withdrawal through ill-health of their nominee⁽³⁾. For a time it seemed possible that the radical, former Liberal MP, Cunningham Graham, would stand as a Nationalist⁽⁴⁾, and there were suggestions that Labour's candidate, Jenny Lee, was so unpopular with the Roman Catholic Church because of her attitude to birth control that she would be opposed by a Roman Catholic candidate⁽⁵⁾. But when nominations closed, only Liberal, Unionist, and Labour candidates were in the field. In fact the birth control controversy, on which Jenny Lee refused to be drawn during the campaign, arguing the matter was 'best kept out of politics', was the only side-issue in a campaign dominated by economic issues and the question of unemployment⁽⁶⁾. When Labour won the seat with an increased vote, the Unionist candidate, Lord Scone, felt the swing against the Conservatives was 'due to depression...in the iron and steel industries'⁽⁷⁾. But the Chairman of the Political Committee of the Scots Conservative Club regarded the by-election as a watershed, showing the 'necessity' for 'steady instruction of the electorate in simple economics'⁽⁸⁾, and the Glasgow Herald felt the results demonstrated that the Unionists had been 'slow to wake' and pointed out how short the time was for them to prepare for an election.

3 Glasgow Herald, February 13, 1929.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid., February 27, 1929.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., March 23, 1929.

8 Ibid.

The results in North Midlothian and Lanark gave the Labour Party a new confidence. Hopes were high even in non-socialist Edinburgh and the Lothians. The Edinburgh Labour Standard, a Labour newspaper, which had been running in the city from 1927, believed that four additional Labour seats could be won, North and West Edinburgh, Leith, and Berwick and Haddington⁽⁹⁾.

It was not surprising therefore that the Conservative, Sir Robert Horne, made an early appeal, as in previous elections, for co-operation between Liberals and Conservatives wherever possible. 'I appeal', he said, 'to every Liberal to do what they did in the last election...there is every reason why the Liberals should act along with the Unionists...the necessity for co-operation was more imperative at the present time than ever before'⁽¹⁰⁾. But there were to be no pacts, agreements, or coalitions at a national level. Indeed in an editorial the Scotsman was to accuse the Liberals of pursuing 'a suicidal policy...it would almost seem as if seats held by Unionists on a doubtful tenure from the socialists have been specifically singled out by the Liberals for attack'⁽¹¹⁾. For the Liberals, centrally at least, there could be no going back on the Lloyd George policy of independence as the means to recovery. The advice was reiterated by the General Council of the Scottish Liberal Federation when Sir John Anthony said: 'Liberal associations existed for one purpose only - to propagate Liberal principles and endeavour to return Liberals to Parliament. In the absence of a Liberal candidate the associations should in his opinion not make any recommendation as to how Liberals in the constituency should vote and thereby save friction and trouble at a future election'⁽¹²⁾.

9 Labour Standard, February-April, 1929. Copies are contained in the Woodburn Papers.

10 Scotsman, April 25, 1929.

11 Ibid., May 18, 1929.

12 Ibid., April 20, 1929.

The Liberal dilemma on agreements was acute. They were determined to be 'wholly independent' as Sir Herbert Samuel put it, having accepted that agreements with Conservatives in October 1924 had made their position electorally impossible. But they were also determined to avoid the charge that they would again allow a minority Labour administration to govern. Throughout the election campaign Liberal leaders promised there would be no repeat of 1924. In January Samuel had told the Liberal Federation Council that: 'progressive-minded people who voted Conservative at the last election may safely vote Liberal for both he and Lloyd George had made it clear that the experiment of 1924 will not be repeated' ⁽¹³⁾.

This brought an angry response from Horne who had been an architect of so many electoral arrangements in the past. He charged Samuel with 'deceit' and argued that Samuel was fishing for conservative votes upon the implication that in the event of a deadlock in parliament after the next election the Liberal party would be more inclined to work with the Conservatives than the socialists: 'It is much more likely if it were a question between socialist and conservative government that Mr Lloyd George would rather support Mr Ramsay MacDonald than Mr Baldwin' ⁽¹⁴⁾. Samuel had to explain in reply that the Liberals 'made and contemplated no pact or understanding of any kind with any other party': 'We made it clear that in the event of no majority, the Liberal Party would not again lend support to the installation and maintenance in office of a socialist government. Whatever situation is found it must be other than that' ⁽¹⁵⁾.

13 Glasgow Herald, January 28, 1929.

14 Ibid., January 29, 1929.

15 Ibid., January 29, 1929.

Labour had to deny evidence also that there was a Lib-Lab pact. Speaking in Scotland during the early stages of the election campaign, Morrison said it was 'utterly untrue', and Johnston argued that such an arrangement, if true, 'would wreck the Labour Party'⁽¹⁶⁾. On the other side, the Glasgow Herald reported allegations that 'there are twenty-two Liberals, whose names I could give you, who have given a pledge to the Tory party that if they are not opposed they will not support putting a Labour Government into office and that they will stand by the Tory Party at all costs'⁽¹⁷⁾.

Undoubtedly there was a powerful Unionist drive for some agreement to protect seats from Labour. Early on in the campaign the Unionists issued a list of seats which they did not propose to fight. They had decided not to contest North Aberdeen, Leith, Montrose, Paisley, and Ross and Cromarty: they stood aside only in fourteen in Britain and of these five were in Scotland⁽¹⁸⁾. Later, they decided to fight only one of Dundee's two seats⁽¹⁹⁾. In addition eleven Liberals were given central Unionist support, although only one of them, Sir Murdoch Macdonald in Inverness, was standing in Scotland. This central action was endorsed by the local Unionist association with its President, Lochiel, stating: 'I need hardly say how important it is that every anti-socialist vote should be recorded and how essential it is to the interests of sound government that all socialist parties be rejected'⁽²⁰⁾.

16 Ibid., April 8, 1929.

17 Ibid., May 3, 1929.

18 Scotsman, May 3, 1929.

19 Ibid., May 15, 1929.

20 Glasgow Herald, May 21, 1929.

Although no documentation survives, it seems likely that the Conservatives would have given more Liberals their support if pressed. When after the election one delegate to the Conservatives' Eastern Divisional Council raised the question of 'amalgamation with the Liberals', and asked both the Scottish Conservative Chairman, Sir Patrick Ford, and the agent, Colonel Blair, 'if it would not be possible for arrangements to be made in certain constituencies with regard to candidates', he was told: 'there was no lack of desire on our part to make such arrangements',⁽²¹⁾.

The Conservatives withdrew in seats where they had in fact little or no organisation. But they hoped that by standing down, the Liberals would be persuaded to stand down for Conservatives elsewhere. The Conservatives stood down, for example, in Ross and Cromarty, with the Unionist Association backing the Liberal candidate and issuing an invitation to its members to vote against the socialist⁽²²⁾. In Dundee, only one Unionist stood in the two member constituency and, as the Scotsman reported, 'though no question of a formal pact arises a strong despite for reciprocity exists'. While the Unionist candidate, Wallace, who had stood in both the general and the by-election in 1924, said he would 'be a party to no agreement', he called himself 'an anti-socialist first and last',⁽²³⁾ and went on to argue:

Many of you are to be asked what is to be done with the Unionist second. Make a broad answer. We ask the support of all moderate parties in Dundee and we are prepared to do the same with such anti-socialists as support. (24)

21 SUA Eastern Divisional Council, July 24, 1929.

22 Scotsman, May 9, 1929.

23 Glasgow Herald, May 15, 1929.

24 Scotsman, May 11, 1929.

There was in fact some reciprocity for Unionist gestures at a local level. In Dunfermline the Liberals supported the Unionist candidate who argued he was 'in a position to call for the support of all people whether Unionists or Liberals who were opposed to socialism',⁽²⁵⁾ On the ground Liberals were active in helping his candidature. The same thing happened in Kirkcaldy - yet another seat where the anti-socialist challenge had been borne previously by Liberal not Conservative parties. Kirkcaldy Burghs Liberal Association had no candidate and decided by a majority to support the Unionist, defeating an amendment leaving the decision to Liberals' own discretion⁽²⁶⁾. While the League of Young Liberals deplored the decision,⁽²⁷⁾ the move by Kirkcaldy Liberals which had had Liberal candidates in the field throughout the twenties reflected how far Conservatism was established as the right wing party in the urban constituencies.

While there was no arrangement in Aberdeenshire the Liberal Party was Labour's right wing opponent in Aberdeen North and the Conservatives the sole opponent to Labour in Aberdeen South and Aberdeenshire East. The Liberal candidate in North argued support for Conservatives elsewhere in preference to Labour, and Boothby, the Conservative member for East Aberdeenshire, urged support for the Liberal in North Aberdeen⁽²⁸⁾.

25 Glasgow Herald, May 20, 1929, Scotsman, May 9, 1929.

26 Scotsman, May 17, 1929, Glasgow Herald, May 17, 1929.

27 Glasgow Herald, May 21, 1929.

28 Scotsman, May 28, 1929.

However, as the Liberals decided to place last-minute candidates in the west of Scotland - in Shettleston, Camlachie, and Lanark constituencies - Unionist tactics shifted from a soft to a hard line. The decision to leave the field free for the Liberals in Paisley was overturned, and matters came to a head over Lady Baxter's proposed Conservative candidature in Montrose, seat of the Liberal Whip, Sir Robert Hutchison, a seat which had gone uncontested by the Conservatives since 1910. Hutchison was a prominent supporter of Lloyd George on his unemployment policy, had strenuously opposed the controversial Conservative Local Government (Scotland) Act and had been instrumental in bringing forward increasing numbers of Liberal candidates. It was his responsibility for candidates that almost brought forth a Conservative opponent, on the initiative of Conservative party headquarters rather than local Unionists in Montrose. When Lady Baxter, who had been pressed by headquarters to go forward, met the local constituency party she faced a divided group. Only eight had turned up and the President, who unsuccessfully proposed that the seat should be left uncontested, later resigned⁽²⁹⁾. He protested at the way 'headquarters takes away the freedom of the electors'. And it was the action of Unionist headquarters in the situation that is significant. As they later explained they had hoped that Hutchison would 'secure reciprocity in constituencies where Liberal candidates have no chance of success and where their standing causes a grave danger of the capture of seats by the Socialist Party', but with Liberal candidates in many seats threatened by Labour, the Unionist policy of self-denial was

29 Scotsman, May 17, 18, 1929. At the Montrose meeting where Lady Baxter was initially adopted the Chairman who opposed a contest was defeated, despite the fact that another member of the Unionist Executive Committee in Montrose argued that 'if headquarters would undertake to get a Liberal for the county to withdraw on the understanding Lady Baxter was to withdraw it would be a very good thing' (Scotsman, May 17, 1929). The President argued, 'our committee can only be ruled by one authority', and resigned over the pressure from headquarters to intervene in the election. But there were, of course, only eight persons present.

no longer justifiable⁽³⁰⁾. In fact Lady Baxter withdrew when she found little support in the constituency and Unionist headquarters argued it was 'most regrettable that this attitude is not reciprocated by the Liberals'⁽³¹⁾.

Unionist Headquarters in Scotland argued that 'in several constituencies in Scotland where Liberal chance of success is thought reasonable no Unionist candidate has been put forward to obviate the danger of a socialist gain through the splitting of the anti-socialist vote'⁽³²⁾. But with the Liberals pursuing additional contests, no further progress could be made in consolidating the anti-socialist forces and thirty-eight three-cornered fights, involving Conservative and Liberal opponents to Labour, occurred. Although this meant that in half its contests Labour had only one anti-socialist opponent, the Scotsman was later to claim that Liberal 'spoiling tactics' has lost Unionist seats in West Edinburgh, Berwick and Haddington, Partick, Dunbartonshire, West Renfrew, Kilmarnock, and Lanark, seven seats in all⁽³³⁾. The Glasgow Herald went further:

Shame must rest with Mr Lloyd George and those other Liberals who were responsible for the policy of running candidates whose prospects from the beginning were hopeless...for the most part the Liberal contribution in the urban areas has been limited to handing the seats over to socialism. (34)

30 Scotsman, May 17, 1929. Headquarters argued that 'as the Liberals were putting forward candidates in constituencies not already contested it was time that they put a Unionist candidate in the field'.

31 Ibid., May 18, 1929.

32 Scotsman, May 18, 1929.

33 Ibid., June 1, 1929.

34 Glasgow Herald, Editorial, June 31, 1929.

In 1929 the Liberals' effort was concentrated in the counties rather than in the burghs. The party intervened in less than half of Scotland's burgh seats (16 of 33) and in twenty-seven of the thirty-eight county seats. In Glasgow and Lanarkshire the party managed only eight candidates - four out of fifteen seats in Glasgow and four out of seven in Lanarkshire. When the Daily News correspondent visited Scotland, he found the west 'the bleakest area for Liberalism I have yet visited'⁽³⁵⁾. The party placed its hopes in winning in the rural areas. As the party's Western Divisional Secretary added:

In the Industrial districts Liberalism had been at a low ebb...hopeful reports had been received from all districts but the flame was burning brightest in the rural districts such as Argyllshire.

The Eastern Secretary spoke of 'great enthusiasm in such districts as East Fife, the Lothians, and the Border Burghs'⁽³⁶⁾.

With Lloyd George's financial support, the rural campaigns were the party's most effective of the twenties. In Argyll, Labour complained of a Liberal 'network of paid agents with a fleet of motor cars and a system of telephone communication'. In the Western Isles the feeling was the same, with a complaint about highly-paid agents and canvassers⁽³⁷⁾.

But taking the country as a whole, the state of Liberal organisation was poor. With Wales and the English counties boasting a bigger Liberal presence in candidates than Scotland, the Scotsman argued, 'the Liberals evidently have small hopes in

35 Daily News, April 9, 1929, quoted in Forward April 13, 1929.

36 Scotsman, April 30, 1929.

37 Forward, June 8.

Scotland. There was a time when Scotland was a Liberal stronghold. Now apparently it is the worst of all fields for Liberal candidates'⁽³⁸⁾. Many local associations had no funds and thirteen of the forty-three candidates were rushed in at the last minute⁽³⁹⁾.

The state of their organisation was not the only problem for Liberals. Prominent members of the party, such as Vivien Philipps in Edinburgh expressed doubts about the validity of the Lloyd George programme to cure unemployment. He had the 'greatest possible hesitation' in supporting the practicability of the scheme and a number of other Liberal candidates shared his doubts. In the Western Isles, MacKenzie Livingston felt that the 'only right course' for him was to retire. Writing to the Chairman of the Western Isles Liberal Association, he stated that he could not endorse the pledge to abolish normal unemployment within 12 months free of cost. 'The promise given', he wrote, 'is one with which I am quite unable to associate myself for I have grave doubts as to the possibility of its fulfilment'⁽⁴⁰⁾. Probably, however, McKenzie Livingston's unease was not simply over unemployment. A year before he had wanted the Lloyd George election fund wound up - and the money given to hospitals⁽⁴¹⁾. McKenzie Livingston defected to the Labour Party but increasingly the Liberal MPs from Scotland were individuals who stood under a Liberal banner rather than Liberal Party representatives and part of the party machine.

38 Scotsman, May 20, 1929. On May 6, according to the Scotsman, there were only 30 Liberals selected. By May 10, forty-three had been chosen.

39 Scotsman, May 10, 1929. For example the Scotsman found Dunbartonshire 'so nearly dead' that it is difficult to get twenty members to attend the annual meeting of the local association'. (Scotsman, May 20, 1929).

40 Glasgow Herald, April 12, 1929.

41 Scotsman, April 25, 1929.

The Conservative campaign, in Scotland at any rate, emphasised social reform without socialism. Prior to the election, industrial and agricultural derating had been agreed, and it was argued that the reform of local government would ease problems over the poor law and the co-ordination of hospitals⁽⁴²⁾. On education, Gilmour claimed he had 'done everything in his power to encourage parents to leave their children at school, to the age of fifteen'. Although compulsory education until this age was 'not practicable now', it would come 'perhaps at a not very distant date'⁽⁴³⁾. On housing, it was argued that more than 70,000 houses had been built over four years, and, for rural areas, Chamberlain promised that by 1931 every cottage in rural Scotland would be in decent repair⁽⁴⁴⁾. Other Unionists were prepared to go further. In Maryhill, Cooper argued for pensions at sixty for workers in 'strenuous' occupations.

There were Labour accusations that the Unionists were fighting a less than fair campaign - for example, publishing false statements about the Roman Catholic Church's attitudes to socialism⁽⁴⁵⁾. However, it was on the general issues of the economy that the election concentrated - with the Conservative solution to unemployment summed up in three words, training, transfer, and trade. They argued that the out-of-work should

42 Glasgow Herald, May 15, 1929.

43 Ibid., May 23, 1929.

44 Ibid., April 23, 1929.

45 Arthur Woodburn was later to accuse Lewis Shedden of Scottish Unionist Association Western Divisional Council of sending a letter, urging that a false statement made by Cardinal Bourne of the Roman Catholic Church be: 'displayed' and distributed judiciously and anonymously where there is a substantial Roman Catholic population. It is suggested that this should be done during the weekend at chapel doors.'

undergo training, if necessary move to other areas, and that in the end what was required was an improvement in trade⁽⁴⁶⁾.

On the day of the 1929 poll, the Scotsman called the election 'the quietest election of recent times'⁽⁴⁷⁾. It was an opinion held throughout the campaign. Four days before nominations closed, its leader writer spoke of: 'the quietest and dullest election for at least forty years...Neither of the parties succeeded in raising an issue which excites any enthusiasm among the electorate, old or new'. He went on: 'The fact is that in spite of high unemployment - which, high as it is, is only about half what it was in 1921, when Mr Lloyd George was Prime Minister - the general standard of living is higher today than it was before the war'⁽⁴⁸⁾.

But neither the Scotsman nor Glasgow Herald - nor indeed, in the end, the Conservatives - had any doubt as to what the main issue of the election should be. The issue was socialism and anti-socialism. As a Scotsman editorial said as early as the 11th of May, Lloyd George was 'of secondary importance'⁽⁴⁹⁾. 'The real issue', it stated on the day of election, 'now no less than 1924 is socialism versus anti-socialism'⁽⁵⁰⁾. The Glasgow Herald was of similar mind: 'More and more the future lies with Unionism and Labour'.

46 Glasgow Herald, April 23, 1929.

47 Scotsman, 30 May 1929

48 Scotsman, 16 May.

49 Scotsman, 11 May, 1929

50 Scotsman, 30 May, 1929.

Ramsay MacDonald had expressed the fear, at the outset of the campaign, that the press would manipulate the issues at the election, and instead of concentrating on the Labour-Unionist contest, would pose the issue as between Liberalism and Conservatism. Writing in Forward, he suggested the 'policy of the press is to boycott the opposition and lead people to assume that the two combatants are the Tory and the Liberal leaders'⁽⁵¹⁾. He also felt that in spite of this, there would be 'another coupon election against Labour' with the party managers making 'private arrangements against Labour'.

While the initial stages of the campaign in Scotland saw discussions of the viability and desirability of the Lloyd George programme on unemployment - promised in the Yellow Book, issued on 13 May - the contest was always tending to become one of Labour against "moderation". When Churchill came on a speaking tour to Scotland, he argued in Edinburgh against Lloyd George's programme and in Glasgow against the socialist creed. But generally the Tory tactic was to emphasise the positive measures of social reform of the previous government⁽⁵²⁾ and at the same time to attack socialist extremism. They were, of course, helped by the divisions within the Labour Party.

But in 1929 the socialist and anti-socialist issues were part of the rhetoric rather than the substance of a campaign which dealt with practical rather than ideological issues. The ILP National Council led by Maxton issued its own programme for the election, proclaiming boldly that 'the issue is between

51 Forward, 4 May, 1929.

52 Scotsman, 26 April 1929.

capitalism and socialism' and arguing for the nationalisation of the banks, railways, mines, and import and export trade as well as for the living wage⁽⁵³⁾. But Labour's own election programme was a mild one emphasising unemployment and social reform measures. Candidates played down nationalisation, according to the Scotsman, which argued the manifesto was further watered down for rural areas⁽⁵⁴⁾. In Aberdeen, for example, the campaign was said to concentrate on practical measures and 'peaceful and democratic progress'⁽⁵⁵⁾. Labour's support for the non-contributory pension was seen as a bigger issue than any proposals for nationalisation and the Scotsman argued that the leading ILPers were isolated in the campaign⁽⁵⁶⁾. Maxton was 'not so much in demand in many of the constituencies' because of his support for left-wing tendencies and Wheatley's political stock had 'sagged to a much greater extent'⁽⁵⁷⁾.

The campaign thus reflected how far Labour had become a party which grounded its electoral appeal on social and economic reforms, rather than full-blooded socialism. In fact in 1929 it has been estimated that only 6% of Labour election addresses mentioned 'socialism' while 43% of Conservative addresses did⁽⁵⁸⁾.

In 1929 only thirty-eight constituencies, just over half Scottish seats, saw three cornered fights involving Liberal, Labour and Conservative (including Dundee as two seats).

53 Scotsman, May 6, 1929.

54 Ibid., May 16, 1929.

55 C Phipps, op.cit., p.157.

56 Scotsman, May 6, 1929.

57 Scotsman, April 25, 1929.

58 A Rowe, The General Election of 1929, Oxford University, B.Phil., 1959, p.203.

TABLE 9.1

1929 Election ContestsNO LIBERAL

Aberdeen S
Aberdeenshire E

Bute and N. Ayr
South Ayrshire

Dumbarton

Dunfermline

Kirkcaldy

West Fife

Bridgeton

Camlachie

Central

Gorbals

Govan H

Hillhead

Pollock

St Rollox

Shettleston

Springburn

Tradeston (11 of 15 Glasgow)

Bothwell

North Lanark

East Renfrew

Stirling and Falkirk

West Stirlingshire

Dundee (one seat)

24

NO LABOUR

Aberdeenshire W
Caithness* (Ind.Lab.
stood).

Orkney and Shetland

NO CONSERVATIVE

Dundee-one seat
Aberdeen North

Montrose

Inverness-shire

Ross and Cromarty

Leith

3

6

Thus in 30, by accident or design, Liberal or Conservative stood down to make the fight against Labour a straight fight. Labour won Partick and South Lanark as a result of Liberal intervention. But Labour believed the Liberals held Leith and the Conservatives retained Renfrew East and North Ayrshire, because the other party did not fight⁽⁵⁹⁾.

While the Liberals gained one quarter of their new seats from Scotland - five out of 19 - and indeed 13 out of their final tally of 59 seats came from Scotland, their win was less impressive than it appeared. Kinnear has suggested that although the Liberals won only a few more seats - nineteen - than in 1924, 'they could point out that whereas in previous elections they had often relied on much Labour or Conservative support, in 1929 they won most of their seats in three cornered contests.' He also adds that the Liberals 'won several seats for the first time since 1918'⁽⁶⁰⁾. In fact in Scotland the picture was far less imposing, despite the gain of five seats. The Liberals had expected to win twenty seats at least in Scotland⁽⁶¹⁾, but they won no seat they had not held in 1923 (and lost in 1924) with the exception only of Kincardine and West Aberdeen which they had held until 1922. Indeed, the Liberals failed to recover in 1929 eight of the seats they had held in 1923. In almost all of these, as in 1924, the Labour intervention was critical and had deprived them of the chance of a straight fight with the Conservatives, with Labour votes moving towards the more radical party. Thus, although, in almost every seat they had contested in 1924, their vote improved and in rural areas more so than Labour, it was insufficient to counteract a strong Labour

59 Forward, June 8, 1929.

60 M Kinnear, The British Voter, p.48.

61 Scotsman, May 13, 1929..

presence. In the Aberdeen and Kincardineshire East seat the Liberals did not fight at all; in two Edinburgh seats, North and West, the Liberals were pushed into third place. Their showing relative to Labour in the seats the party lost in 1924 and failed to regain in 1929 is set out in below. While in most cases the party's vote improved more than Labour's, they could not counteract the strong third party effect which the Labour vote registered. This left the Conservatives in charge.

TABLE 9.2

Liberal Improvement and Labour Vote, 1924-1929

Former Liberal Seats

	<u>% Liberal Improvement</u>	<u>% Labour Improvement and % Vote</u>
Argyll	+1%	+0.7% 23.8%
Aberdeenshire & Kincardine Central	+1.5%	-0.7% 17.7%
Forfarshire	+4.8%	+2.1% 25.0%
Perth	+5.7%	+2.7% 23.5%
Edinburgh East	+0.4%	+3.0% 47.3%
Edinburgh North * (3rd)	+5.4%	+4.3% 32.2%
Edinburgh West * (3rd)	-0.6%	+5.6% 38.6%
Aberdeenshire & Kincardine East	No Candidate	+13.7% 43.1%

Even in the thirteen seats the Liberals won, they owed much to the other parties. Five of the thirteen were won in straight fights, with no Conservative intervention in Inverness, Ross and Cromarty, Montrose, and Leith and with no Labour candidate in West Aberdeen. Leith, which the Liberals had narrowly won in the by-election of 1927, was held simply because the Conservatives did not intervene, (and almost all the Conservative vote seemed to swing to Liberal). The second urban constituency the Liberals held in 1929, Greenock, was won simply because as in 1924 there was a Communist-Labour

Party split. Sir Godfrey Collins' vote (only 32.5%) was less than a third of the total cast. In the other seats the Liberals benefited from a swing from Conservative to Liberal. East Fife and Galloway saw the first Labour interventions ever in a general election and in Western Isles the first Conservative one. In all eight three-party contests the Liberals had not the benefit of any swing from Labour but a swing from the Conservatives was sufficient to give them Banff, Dumfries, Fife East, and Galloway.

Labour believed that the main reason for the Liberal success was Lloyd George's political fund. In Argyll, for example, the Labour Party's poverty was contrasted with the Liberal network of paid agents with a fleet of motor cars and a system of telephone communications, and Forward claimed of the Western Isles that 'we would have won this seat if it had not been for Lloyd George's money',⁽⁶²⁾. The Conservatives argued that 'in some constituencies where there was no Liberal candidate it is thought that many Liberals did not vote at all and that a number voted Labour rather than Unionist',⁽⁶³⁾. But the evidence suggests that the important characteristic was a swing from Conservative to Liberals and that a number of factors influenced this. One reason the Conservative Party accepted was that the local government act which had reduced the status of small towns in the local government system had been 'misrepresented' and had lost the party votes in Roxburgh, East Fife, West Aberdeenshire, Kilmarnock, and Dunbartonshire⁽⁶⁴⁾. The Conservatives also believed that the disquiet felt in Scotland's fishing communities about the effects of Conservative policies had helped the Liberals⁽⁶⁵⁾. But the Conservatives believed that the Liberal improvement was transient and that the results emphasised a

62* Forward, June 8, 1929.

63 'Impressions on the General Election', Paper by Colonel Blair in Gilmour Papers, GD/383/29, July 12, 1929.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.

restoration of the two party system. Just after the election, the Conservative agent in Scotland, Blair, who had been asked by Gilmour to examine the merits of a proportional representation system and how that might prevent further Labour advances, found no one in favour of an alternative vote system on these lines and he concluded that it could only be 'the means of temporarily prolonging the life of a moribund party'. The three party system of competition which appeared to prevail in Scotland in the nineteen twenties was seen to have been 'transient'⁽⁶⁶⁾. The President of the Scottish Unionist Association, the Duke of Atholl, drew the same conclusion:

What a result as a whole. I cannot help however, hoping that it will bring many Liberals to see that we must have a closing-up of the anti-socialist forces.⁽⁶⁷⁾

As the political parties moved nearer to each other in policy, the electoral map of Scotland became more class-oriented, with Labour winning almost all the industrial and mining seats of Scotland in 1929, and Liberals and Conservatives sharing the middle class seats and rural areas. The four exceptions to the industrial picture were Leith and Greenock, which the Liberals held, and Midlothian and Peebles North and Renfrew East - two seats which Labour had won for the first time in 1923 and lost in 1924. The party was unable to recover Renfrew or to hold on to Midlothian and Peebles North which they had won earlier in 1929 in a by-election. Otherwise, the industrial areas went heavily to the Labour Party. Labour won back nine seats it had lost to the Conservatives in the 1924 election and held two of its three by-election victories (Linlithgow and North Lanark). The party also managed to win Edinburgh West for the first time.

66 Ibid.

67 Atholl to Gilmour, June 1, 1929, Gilmour Papers GD/383/29.

Nevertheless Labour did not believe it had done as well as it might have. The party felt that it had been hampered by lack of finance. In 1929 Labour's financial problems hit its campaign severely. The party spent less than in the three previous elections (1922, 1923 and 1924) despite the much larger electorate and the five years the party had to prepare for the campaign. The average expenditure for constituencies was substantially below the previous election. And despite the fact Labour had candidates in sixty-seven of seventy-one constituencies, there were few where it spent much more than the average. The exceptions were the unique two member seat in Dundee where their candidate incurred £644 in expenses, and South Ayrshire where the miners' president, James Brown, spent £609. From a position where the miners had spent more than twice as much as the average, the miners' election expenses were little more than the average of £312 in the Lanarkshire, the Lothian, Fife, and Falkirk constituencies. Apart from James Brown in South Ayrshire no miners' candidates spent more than £400 in contesting their seats⁽⁶⁸⁾.

TABLE 9.3
Average Election Expenses

	GB Average	Scottish Labour Average	Scotland Total spent by Labour	Range in Labour Expenses
1922	£707	£447	(43)*£19,207	£145-£921
1923	£679	£384	(48) £18,425	£113-£821
1924	£645	£321	(64) £20,537	£112-£595
1929**	£701	£312	(67) £20,976	£ 75-£609

* No. of Labour Candidates

** In Britain in 1929 Conservative Expenses averaged £915:

Labour Expenses £452: and Liberal Expenses £800.

68 Labour Party, Scottish Council, Report of Executive, 1930, p.2-4. See in addition, F Craig, British Parliamentary Election Statistics, p.44. and A Rowe, op.cit. p.535.

Reports from the constituencies confirmed the picture. East Renfrew 'had very little money', Kelvingrove 'almost no Labour Party machinery', and Hillhead lacked 'an efficient organisation'. The party felt especially aggrieved in rural areas where it had found 'highly paid agents and canvassers' funded by Lloyd George's political fund(69).

But Labour also felt that it had a long way to go in attracting the support of certain sections of the Scottish working-class. The rural areas remained a disappointment; but so too did the unskilled manual worker. The Edinburgh North candidate, Eleanor Stewart, confirmed an opinion that had been widely shared by others when she argued that propaganda was clearly needed in the poorer districts, since it seemed the bulk of Labour support had come to have come from 'artisans, civil servants, and the lower middle class elector'(70). While Labour had 'politicised' the skilled manual worker and the miner, it had not yet persuaded many of the less skilled sections to vote.

But the new Parliament of 1929 reflected the changing character of the Labour Party. Seventeen of Labour's Scottish contingent were from middle class occupations and other six had been trade union or political organisers before the election.

Labour looked more of a middle class party in Parliament than at previous elections, although a third of the Scottish group were still miners or engineers. But the new group also reflected the shift to the right in Scottish politics. In 1918 Labour's Scottish

69 Forward, June 8, 1929.

70 Forward, June 15, 1929.

group did not look left-wing although most parliamentary candidates had been. In 1922 the Parliamentary Party looked more to the left than perhaps it actually was. But in 1929, while the ILP and miners' union still provided the bulk of the sponsorships - twenty-seven out of thirty-six - they were hardly dominated by the left wing⁽⁷¹⁾. The miners' MPs had been antagonistic to the claims of the ILP throughout and any influence Maxton and Wheatley had over them had been diminished by the retiral of Robert Smillie. But of the ILP contingent, only a few could be relied on to support a left wing stance. Shinwell and Johnston were to join the new Government; McNeill Weir had been prominent in attacking Maxton in the twenties; and even the twelve potential supporters - a third of the Scottish group - were not fully united in their views. The Scottish group in 1929 represented the voice of Labour, not socialism.

71 In the rest of Britain the ILP influence was diminished, with constituency Labour parties providing the bulk of sponsorships in the election. In Scotland only five of the thirty-six victorious Labour candidates were sponsored by divisional Labour Parties. But as the chapter suggests, the strength of the ILP's contingent did not reflect a united front.

CONCLUSION

In 1919 the Conservative Leader, Andrew Bonar Law, is said to have attended a dinner party when speculation over socialism came to dominate the conversation. Bonar Law was asked what he thought Labour supporters really wanted. Looking round the dining room at the silver and crystal which adorned it, Bonar Law replied, 'perhaps they just want a little of all this'⁽¹⁾. However, most Scottish Conservatives went beyond the mere suspicion that class envy lay behind the aspirations of Labour. To the political establishment of the day Labour leaders may have seemed, as Cowling suggests, 'paper tigers', but among Conservatives in Scotland the fear was of Bolshevism, with Scotland suffering from the 'disease' that was sweeping westwards from Russia, and figures such as William Adamson and Ramsay MacDonald seen as British Kerenskis who would pave the way for a home-grown Lenin. In 1918 the fear was that Bolshevism would be transplanted from Russia to Britain, with the Glasgow Herald asking, 'are we to escape from this universal epidemic'⁽²⁾. The 1919 strikes were inspired by 'Bolshevism', according to the Daily Record and Mail and 'the first step towards that squalid terrorism', according to the Glasgow Herald⁽³⁾. In time the alarm of the right changed simply to fear of a British form of socialism. By the later twenties many Conservatives even accepted that Labour voters were not necessarily full-blooded socialists. Even then, however, they could not be sure. In 1929, the right in Scotland rallied against the evils of socialism, although the substance of the political arguments revolved around issues of social and economic reform.

Yet by 1929 all the cardinal elements of a modern, relatively stable, and consensual political system for Scotland had been assembled. Under a mass franchise, a new type of two party system

1 R Blake, The Unknown Prime Minister: The Life and Times of Andrew Bonar Law, 1858-1923 (London, 1955), p.412.

2 Glasgow Herald, November 16, 1918.

3 Glasgow Herald, January 31, 1919.

had come into being. In 1929 the Liberals won 18% of the popular vote, a third of their pre-war share, and the average vote for Liberal candidates in the field was 65% of that for Labour and 75% of that for Conservative candidates. It might still have seemed that the Liberal decline could not be equated with their downfall. Constituency by constituency, however, Scotland had in the twenties gone over to a two party system, or at best a trinity of most unequal partners. In most areas where the Liberals prospered, their survival depended on the weakness of one of the two other parties. In the Inverness constituencies, Caithness, and Orkney, where the Liberals remained the dominant force, it was as one of only two effective parties in the field. Elsewhere Conservatives rather than the Liberals offered the major opposition to Labour; or alternatively Labour rather than the Liberal candidates were the major alternatives to the Conservatives. In those few industrial seats where the Liberal message still held some sway, its survival was at the behest of the Conservative Party. When Asquith was finally ejected from Scotland after his defeat in Paisley in 1924, he had admitted as much. His result was, he concluded, 'not bad for a dying party set between the upper and nether millstones'. The country, he said, was divided 'between tranquillity and socialism'⁽⁴⁾.

The argument of the preceding chapters has been that what determined the shape of the Scottish political system from 1918 onwards was the advance and the threat of Labour. It is important therefore to appreciate the extent and the limits of Labour's breakthrough. Tables 10.1 and 10.2 summarise the electoral changes from 1918 to 1929, first by constituency successes, and then by vote. From Table 10.1 it can be seen quite clearly that Labour had by 1922 a solid group of constituencies that it held in every election of the twenties. Table 10.2 shows quite clearly

4 J Kelley, Asquith at Paisley..., loc.cit., p.159.

that the left's share of the vote was increasing throughout the twenties, rising even as the party lost seats, as in the election of 1924⁽⁵⁾. From being a negligible force in Scottish politics before 1914, Labour progressed, winning just under 30% of the vote in 1918, more than a third in 1922, and more than 40% in both 1924 and 1929. But Labour's advance was not uniform. Indeed the Party's growing support came in staggered breakthroughs in different areas of Scotland and the decade from 1918 saw losses, as well as gains. Tables 10.3 and 10.7 show the differential Labour advances in industrial cities, county shires, and burghs. Labour's attempt to win the rural areas was virtually still-born. Table 10.3 and 10.4 (where adjustment is made for uncontested seats) shows that it was in the industrial cities - Glasgow, Dundee, and Aberdeen - that Labour had achieved its most solid support before 1914. This provided a platform for the swing to the Labour Party by the new electorate of 1918.

5 For figures in this and the following tables, I am grateful for the computing assistance of Mr Ian Levitt.

TABLE 10.1 (A)

Labour 'Safe' Seats by Year of General Election Win

LABOUR HELD SEATS

1918	1922	1923	1924	1929
Aberdeen N				
Dundee				
Govan				
Gorbals				
Ayr South				
Fife West				
Edinburgh C	Dumbarton Burghs			
Hamilton	Dunfermline			
	Glasgow Bridgeton			
	Camlachie			
	St Rollox			
	Shettleston			
	Springburn			
	Tradeston			
	Bothwell			
	Coatbridge			
	Rutherglen			
	Stirling/Clack.East			
	Midlothian and Peebles South			
	Kirkcaldy			
			Edinburgh East	
			Paisley	
			Stirling and Falkirk	

TABLE 10.1 (B)
Other Labour Seats

	1922	1923	1924	1929
Maryhill	X	X	-	X
North Lanark	X	X	-	X
Linlithgow	X	X	-	X
W. Renfew	X	X	-	X
Stirling/				
Clack.East	X	X	-	X
Partick	-	X	-	X
Kilmarnock	-	X	-	X
Berwick and				
Haddington	-	X	-	X
Dunbartonshire	-	X	-	X
Lanark	-	X	-	X
N.Midlothian/				
Peebles	-	X	-	-
E Renfrew	-	X	-	-
Motherwell	X(CP)	-	X	X
Edinburgh West	-	-	-	X

TABLE 10.2

% Votes Cast for Parties (and Allies) 1918-1929

	1918	1922	1923	1924	1929
Labour *	28.5	33.6	38.3	41.8	43.5
Co.Labour	1.3				
Liberal	14.2	21.5	28.4	16.5	18.1
Co.Lib.	20.3				
Conservative**	33.5	39.2	31.6	40.8	35.9
Ind.	2.0	2.1	1.7	0.9	2.5

* For purposes of this table Labour's vote has been augmented by adding votes of allies including Communist and Scottish Prohibition Party.

** For purposes of this table, Conservative vote has had added to it Liberal Unionist, National Liberal, Coalition Conservative and National Democratic Party.

The basic electoral data is drawn from F W S Craig, British Parliamentary Election Results, 1918-1945, as cited above.

TABLE 10.3 (A)

Labour Advance 1910-1929Percentage Vote By Areas

	1910	1918	1922	1923	1924	1929
Industrial						
Cities	14.0	34.9	44.0	49.0	49.1	53.8
Industrial						
Counties	6.3	35.0	45.6	50.4	47.1	51.9
Burghs	4.6	26.7	36.8	39.5	46.0	48.7

TABLE 10.4 (B)

Labour Advance 1910 -1929:Adjusting for contestsPercentage Vote by Areas

	Best Vote						
	1906-14	1910	1918	1922	1923	1924	1929
	(D)	(C)					
Industrial							
Cities	32	29	36.4	50.6	49.0	49.7	53.5
Industrial							
Counties	27	25	36.5	47.1	50.4	47.1	51.9
Burghs	23	19	30.0	41.0	43.4	46.0	48.7

TABLE 10.5

% Addition to Labour Vote:Adjusting for Contests 1910-1929

	1918-22	1922-23	1923-24	1924-29
Industrial				
Cities	+14.2	-1.6	+0.7	+3.8
Industrial				
Counties	+10.6	+3.4	-3.4	+4.8
Burghs	+11.0	+2.4	+2.6	+2.7

TABLE 10.6

Summary of Labour Advance Adjusted for Controls

1924 = 100

	Best Vote						
	1906-14	1910	1918	1922	1923	1924	1929
Industrial							
Cities	64	58	73	102	99	100	110
Industrial							
Counties	57	53	77	100	107	100	110
Burghs	50	41	65	89	94	100	106

TABLE 10.7% Labour Vote in Rural Shires and Highlands

	1918	1922	1923	1924	1929
Rural	5.4	2.5	3.5	18.4	21.5
Highlands	15.8	0.0	14.6	27.5	26.8

(A) The division of Scotland into the categories above is based on the social composition of the areas and is broadly in line with that suggested by M Kinnear's classifications in The British Voter. The following constituencies make up the classifications used:

Industrial Cities	:	Glasgow, Aberdeen Dundee
Industrial Counties	:	Ayrshire, Dunbarton, Renfrew, Lanark, Lothians, Stirling, West Fife
Burghs	:	Edinburgh, Leith, Kirkcaldy, Dunfermline, Montrose, Stirling, Coatbridge, Motherwell, Hamilton, Rutherglen, Dumbarton, Paisley, Greenock, Ayr, Kilmarnock
Rural Shires	:	Moray, Banff, Aberdeen Forfar, Perth, East Fife, Roxburgh, Dumfries, Galloway.

For the purposes of this classification, the Highland constituencies are understood to be Orkney, Caithness, Ross and Cromarty, Inverness, Western Isles and Argyll.

- (B) The adjustments made for 'non contests' are estimates. The methodology has been to make an assessment of the potential size of the Labour vote in seats which the party did not contest, based on the general swing in the same group of constituencies and related to the party's subsequent vote in the constituency.
- (C) The 1910 share is an estimate and may be regarded as the maximum possible Labour vote in the January 1910 election, assuming the Party had contested each seat. It is based on the % vote in constituencies fought in each group in January 1910, divided by the number of fights and multiplied by the total number of constituencies. Constituencies which became 'city' or 'county' constituencies after 1918 have been placed in their post-war categorisation.
- (D) The 'best vote' 1906-1914 is an estimate and may be regarded as the maximum possible Labour vote at any time before 1914. The methodology of calculating the share is the same as that for calculating the 1910 share except that the votes on which the assessment was based are the best votes Labour received between 1906 and 1914.

The industrial counties present a different picture. Here, as our discussion of Lanarkshire in Chapter One illustrated, Labour had made insufficient headway before 1914 to threaten the position of the other two parties. By 1918 however, Labour's vote in these areas had arisen to an average of 36-37% - almost the same proportion as in the industrial cities. It suggests that in 1918 Labour enjoyed the support of substantial sections of workers in heavy industry and the coal mines. Between 1918 and 1922 most headway was made in the cities, particularly because Labour's policy seemed more relevant to highly urbanised areas. But in both industrial city and industrial county seats, Labour could claim that by 1922 the party had, or was in sight of, majority support.

Labour's major advance in the burghs of Scotland came later. At its maximum, Labour's support in the burghs in 1910 was only around 20%. In 1918 it was less than 30%. In 1922 the party failed to make gains that were commensurate with those in the cities and industrial counties. Labour's 'arrival' in the burghs appears to have come between 1922 and 1924 with a 5% swing to Labour there, contrasting with a declining or stationary Labour vote elsewhere. The pattern suggests that the burghs saw a more complex ideological battle between Labour, Liberals, and Conservatives, and that it took until 1924 for Labour fully to establish its position.

The limits to Labour's advance are most clearly seen in the rural areas and in the Highlands. Certainly as Table 10.8 shows Labour contested few constituencies until the later twenties. But no matter how Labour's performance is viewed the party was a marginal force outside the 'central belt' and the cities. It would appear that the party's performance was better in 1918 and in immediate post-war by-elections than at almost any time during the inter-war years, so suggesting that Labour's appeal was more wide-ranging

before the effects of the depression influenced political change.⁽⁶⁾

TABLE 10.8
Labour Interventions in Rural Area

	1918	1922	1923	1924	1929
Highlands (6 seats)	4	0	1	3	5
Rural Shires					
(12 seats)	1	1	1	9	11

6 There are few rural seats, as Table 10.8 confirms, which Labour contested continuously in the nineteen twenties. But the following constituencies suggest Labour's support in 1918 was higher or nearly as high as later - and certainly Labour's rural vote was a higher proportion of its industrial vote in contested seats than it was to be later.

TABLE 10.9
Share of Vote in Selected Rural Seats

	1918	1918-22	1922	1923	1924	1929
Aberdeenshire						
Central		26.4%*			18.4%	17.7%
Roxburgh	29.9%			26.1%	26.2%	27.6%
Argyll	18.6%	35.1%**			22.7%	23.8%

* 1919 by-election

** 1920 by-election.

However, it should be noted that in Western Isles where the party did badly in 1918-10.2% - the party's vote rose - in 1924 to 17.7% and 1929, 32.5% - in three party contests. But before the 1929 election the Liberal MP, McKenzie Livingstone, had defected to Labour.

In fact in all areas it became obvious during the twenties that further progress beyond the initial gains would be difficult. Although the burghs shifted to Labour latest, the plateau reached in the industrial cities and shires was hardly surpassed in any area in the twenties. Taking into account seats Labour did not contest, the evidence suggests Labour could not build further on its strength in the cities and shires. In other words there were trends resisting Labour throughout industrial Scotland as much as there were trends pushing Labour up to its plateau of 47-54%. In industrial as well as rural Scotland, there were distinct limits to Labour's advance. Far from becoming a party of all Scotland in the way the Liberals had once been, Labour became identified with clearly defined sections of society. In particular, it appears to have been the party which spoke most for the industrial worker of the cities and towns and the miners of the industrial shires.

Much of this study has concentrated on the electoral politics of those parties to the right of Labour. By examining their manoeuvres and calculations it is possible to construct a profile of political activity which shows that the real issue was seen on the right as a conflict with socialism. Firstly, in almost every one of the five elections of the period, with the exception perhaps of 1923, it was a matter of judgement for Liberals and Conservatives as to how far they were prepared to allow genuine disagreements to affect the unity of anti-socialist forces. Secondly, which constituted the better anti-socialist party was also a clear matter for discussion in many cases. Both parties sought to develop modern forms of political organisation capable of adjusting to the new mass politics. While the Conservatives were able to build a successful anti-socialist machine especially in the urban areas, the Liberals singularly failed to do so, and, as we have seen, even in 1929, when the party's local organisations were centrally financed virtually for the first time, the concentration of effort was on the rural areas. In these circumstances the fate of Liberalism seems little tied to support for a distinctive Liberal ideology but rather enmeshed in the general politics of combating socialism.

Our account has suggested that voters sensed a futility rather than vitality in the three-party system once Labour became an alternative government. Of course, the rise of Labour was not a function of Liberal decline. Matthew, McKibbin, and Kay have suggested that 'the disintegration of the Liberal Party did not produce large net gains for either of its rivals and it is slightly more probable that the Conservatives were the main beneficiaries'⁽⁷⁾. This is in accord with the conclusions of Butler and Stokes who ground their judgements about politics in the twenties on interviews with voters in the sixties, who were asked to name their previous political preferences and the preferences of their fathers. These authors argue that only a minority of historic Liberal support went to Labour, and the proportion that went to the Conservatives was found to be greater among those whose fathers were remembered as Liberals and among those who named their own earlier preference as Liberal. They suggest as a result that Labour's new-found strength was achieved most of all by mobilising the support of manual workers who grew up in relatively non-political homes⁽⁸⁾. The Scottish evidence seems to support this interpretation, that previous Liberal sympathisers were more likely to move to the Conservatives than to Labour in the nineteen twenties.

The precise extent of the move to the Conservatives is, of course, uncertain; since most voters in the general elections of 1918 and 1922 had not voted before 1918, it is quite possible that most previous Liberal voters retained their old loyalties, as Matthew, McKibbin, and Kay have suggested. This may be so, but the more important issue is not whether individuals who voted Liberal before 1914 continued to do so in the 1920's but whether among new voters a similarly convinced group of Liberals existed. Matthew, McKibbin,

7 Matthew, McKibbin and Kay, op.cit., p.739

8 D Butler and D Stokes, Political Change in Britain, (London, 1970).

and Kay in fact suggest that in the nineteen-twenties about twenty-five to thirty per cent of those who voted Liberal were 'unwilling to vote for either of the other two parties'⁽⁹⁾.

How can one test this hypothesis for Scotland? It is possible to do so perhaps by examining differential turnouts in contests in which Liberal candidates stood or were absent, since the difference in turnout might suggest the existence of Liberals who preferred to abstain rather than to vote Conservative or Labour. The picture is, of course, complicated by the Liberal splits; whether a Liberal voter in 1918 and 1922 would have regarded Coalition Liberal and National Liberal candidates as genuine Liberals is unclear. But the evidence suggests that there was no positive effect on turnout where an independent Liberal stood. In 1918, the turnout without independent Liberals averaged 59% and with Liberals 54%. In 1922 the turnout without Liberals averaged 78% and with Liberals 72%. In other words a Liberal intervention does not seem to have had the effect of raising turnout, and the absence of a Liberal did not appear to make voters stay at home. In 1923 and later there is no discernible difference at all in turnout in these two types of contest. In fact the prime determinant of turnout between 1918 and 1923 appears to have been the Labour Party's decision to intervene or not, as the table below suggests.

TABLE 10.10

Average Turnouts with and without Labour Candidates

	1918	1922	1923
With Labour	58%	75%	72%
Without Labour	51%	62%	66%

9 Matthew, McKibbin, and Kay, op.cit., p.739.

Thus in the three vital elections of 1918, 1922 and 1923, it appears that there was a committed group of Labour supporters who would abstain if no Labour candidate was in the field, but no similarly committed group of Liberals. However, Liberal interventions did affect Labour and Conservative voting potential and at least until 1924, the appearance of a Liberal candidate would attract back voters who had previously defected⁽¹⁰⁾.

Table 10.11 summarises Liberal decline. It offers a useful counter to those who imply that Scotland's political map was uniform. Throughout the twenties the Liberals remained the dominant party of the Highlands, although the party's share of the vote fell there, and, to a lesser extent, the major party of the rural shires⁽¹¹⁾. But the Table shows clearly that the Liberal vote had collapsed almost entirely in the industrial counties and the cities in 1918 and 1922; that the Liberals retained a significant presence in the burghs, but only until 1924;⁽¹²⁾ and that generally the Liberals were being reduced to a small part of the anti-socialist movement led by the Conservatives.

10 In 1923, in seats where Liberals stood and where there had been no Liberal candidate in 1922, the Labour vote increased in seven seats but fell in ten. When no Liberals stood, although the party had put forward candidates in 1922, the Labour vote increased in four cases and declined in one. This contrasts with the position in nineteen of the twenty-one other constituencies fought by Labour where Labour's vote increased irrespective of whether Liberals had contested both elections or been absent on both occasions.

11 This conclusion is similar to that of Cook who suggests that 'it is essential to contrast the relatively sudden collapse of the party in the majority of the large cities and mining areas with the persistent strength of the Liberal Party elsewhere. In 1923, in voting behaviour, Britain was essentially divided into two nations, the urban and the rural. The chronology, the extent, and the speed of Liberal decline were quite different in each'. Age of Alignment, p.340.

12 The swings against Liberal MP's in the burghs were extremely high - against Asquith in Paisley, 13%, and Collins in Greenock, 12% - in 1924, thus suggesting that the polarisation between Labour and the right had taken place.

Perhaps the clearest evidence of this is the small number of seats won by the Liberals in three-party contests (with Conservatives and Labour) throughout the twenties. Moreover, in the rural areas, where the Liberals continued to prosper and won three-party contests, the successful candidates seem less party spokesmen than political figures with a powerful local following, who claimed considerable freedom from the party line.

TABLE 10.11
Liberal Share of Vote by Areas 1910-1929

	1910	1918	1922	1923	1924	1929
Industrial Cities	48.5	4.7 (17.3)*	10.7	17.8	8.5	8.8
Industrial Counties	54.3	11.7 (12.8)	12.1	15.4	6.4	8.3
Burghs	57.2	22.6 (18.4)	23.8	38.1	24.5	20.8
Rural Shires	60.0	36.6 (17.0)	50.8	49.6	30.6	36.3
Highlands		14.2 (70.0)	45.2	54.7	47.6	53.1

* () Figures within brackets denote 'Coalition Liberal' share of the vote.

In fact two processes were at work during the decade: from 1918 the success of Labour at the expense of socialism, and the triumph of Conservatism at the expense of laissez-faire individualism. To different degrees by 1929 both right and left offered the electorate social and economic reform. The Conservatives were alive to the need to offer the electorate a measure of interventionism while their rallying-point was still the fight against socialism. By 1929, with the defeat of the industrial

and political left in the Labour Party in Scotland, even the position of Maxton and Wheatley who argued for 'socialism with speed' was viewed with suspicion by many of the leaders of both the Independent Labour Party and the Labour Party in Scotland⁽¹³⁾.

How had Labour managed to become a party which was increasingly part of an established order many felt it had threatened to overthrow? In previous accounts, answers to this question have concentrated on the national perspective of party politics. Thus, in the traditional accounts which emphasise the organisational achievement of Labour, the conventional view, best expressed by McKibbin, argues that as soon as the trade unions espoused the Labour cause, the socialism of the party inevitably evaporated; Labour's mass support rested merely on 'a highly developed class consciousness and intense class loyalties', which had no socialist content⁽¹⁴⁾. An alternative view, from the left, has emphasised Labour's betrayal by its leadership, its avowed Parliamentaryism at a time when extra-parliamentary (and anti-parliamentary) industrial and political struggle ought to have been waged, and Labour's failure to give content to its commitment to socialist change⁽¹⁵⁾.

13 One example of the change in Labour is to compare the manifestoes of 1918 and 1929. In 1918 Labour demanded 'the immediate nationalisation and democratic control of vital public services such as mines, railways, shipping, armaments and electrical power' as well as a capital levy. The Labour Party's Scottish manifesto went further. In 1929 the party's 'shopping list' for public ownership included only coal and land. The emphasis in 1929 had shifted to 'a peaceful but determined national development and reconstruction'.

14 R McKibbin, op.cit., p.XIV and pp.236-247. He argues that if the war did not necessarily mean the defeat of socialism in Britain it did mean the defeat of socialists.

15 McNeill Weir's polemic against Ramsay MacDonald is one early statement of the position; Miliband, for example, takes the issue further, suggesting that 'Labour's leadership was clearly imbued with Parliamentaryism and always rejected the kind of political action, such as political action for industrial purposes which fell or which appeared to fall outside the framework and conventions of the parliamentary system'. For a fuller statement of his argument, see Parliamentary Socialism, (London, 1964). See also L McNeill Weir, The Tragedy of Ramsay MacDonald, (London, 1938).

But is either the correct framework within which to view Labour's changing character? As one writer has suggested, both explanations betray 'a whiggish concern with the rise and consolidation of the Labour Party and the emergence of trade unionism as an estate of the realm', with, on the one hand, leaders praised for encouraging this trend or, on the other, blamed for encouraging 'the progressive subordination of the working class'⁽¹⁶⁾. In fact, both fail to connect the experience of local areas with national politics and to appreciate the way in which popular attitudes were changing during the nineteen twenties.

In explaining the changing political situation in the twenties it is important to understand what kind of party Labour became. First, Labour never achieved its aim of becoming a mass membership party in Scotland. At its peak the Independent Labour Party, which provided most of the Labour Party's individual members, had only 9,000 Scottish members. In 1929 this figure had dwindled to less than 5,000. In 1928 when figures for individual Labour Party branch membership were first compiled, Labour's entire Scottish membership numbered less than 12,000, a tiny proportion of Labour's Scottish vote. This was not a result of competition from other left-wing parties. At its peak, in 1926, Communist Party membership in Scotland was less than 3,000⁽¹⁷⁾.

16 J Hinton, New Left Review, No. 182, 1981 who argues that in response to the school of historians who concentrate on 'Labour's magnificent journey' a Marxist school has reconstructed 'an alternative magnificent journey, a stream of pure proletarian self-expression - from syndicalism to the Communist Party'.(pp.88-92). It is as he implies a historiography of titans and traitors, rebels who resisted the blandishments of the establishment and leaders who fell for the aristocratic embrace, and it explains little.

17 S . McIntyre, Little Moscows: Communism and Working Class Militancy in Interwar Britain (Cambridge, 1980), p.28.

Together Labour and all left-wing parties in Scotland had fewer members throughout the twenties than the Conservative Party, although a few politically active members could assume a dominance in communities, in spite of the smallness of local Labour branches⁽¹⁸⁾. Secondly, for most of the twenties there was never in fact an industrial base of support for the political militancy to which the Labour party aspired in the immediate post-war period. STUC membership, for example, never recovered from its peak of 1919, when more than half a million workers were affiliated. For the rest of the twenties it oscillated between 250,000 and 350,000;⁽¹⁹⁾ and one of the strongest industrial unions, the miners, saw its membership halved during this period of relative stability.

In these circumstances the party increasingly saw its role as a force to protect and defend the industrial working-class. It adjusted to the depression. As the twenties progressed its strength became concentrated in the areas where trade union activity was strong. This was as true of the ILP as much as the Labour Party. Labour was thus increasingly restricted to the

18 As McIntyre argues in respect of the Vale of Leven Communist Party, a group of less than one hundred 'drew on the spirit of solidarity' which characterised the area and assumed an importance far beyond their membership, S. McIntyre, op.cit., p.28.

19 Forward, April 28, 1928. Membership figures for the STUC were:

1921	536,432	1925	423,645
1922	226,822	1926	328,922
1923	250,949	1927	307,676
1924	324,157	1928	278,398

central belt and rested on the support of particular occupational groups. It failed to build on the possibilities of support which had been revealed in the rural areas in 1918. It did not successfully exploit anti-landlord feeling and did not make much headway in the small one-industry towns of rural Scotland. It saw this failure as a result of the low level of trade unionism in these areas,⁽¹⁹⁾ although constituencies there had a high proportion of working-class electors. Ironically, the party which had set out to build socialism (and come to the aid of trade unions) was increasingly reliant on trade unionism for Labour votes.

Was it inevitable that the Labour Party became the political expression of class consciousness, expressed in trade unionism, and a party which prospered or fell largely according to the strength of trade union activity in different areas? While no study of the quantitative electoral data can answer such a question, the evidence does suggest that Parkin's model of political change, explored in our introduction, accurately describes the kind of Labour Party that had emerged by the end of the period. However, we have to ask why the class consciousness which developed among the industrial working-class of Scotland failed to extend to all manual workers, and why that class consciousness did not develop into the 'socialist' consciousness, which Labour leaders in

19 In 1924 the STUC investigation of trade union strength found the Highlands 'practically devoid of trade unionism'. There were only 10,000 trade unionists in the Highlands and Islands and 10,000 in the North East outside Aberdeen. Similarly in the counties of Berwick, Peebles, Roxburgh, Selkirk, Dumfries, and Galloway, there were in all only 16,000 trade unionists. What is interesting is that the situation had changed little by 1947 when a new survey was done (membership was only 12,000 in Dumfries and Galloway, 43,000 in the North East and Highlands, and had fallen in the south east Borders). Information from STUC Conference Reports, 1925 and 1948).

Scotland in 1918 had indicated would develop there. Some writers⁽²⁰⁾ stress that the new electorate were 'politically immature', that their horizons were limited, and that leaders (no matter how much the charge of 'betrayal' is made) were more radical than the electorate they sought to represent (and so justifiably could not be expected to go much further than their supporters sought to do). In reply, those who accept Parkin's approach can point to the 'socialising' role of the key institutions of society - from the churches to the education system - and argue that Labour contributed to, rather than challenged, the prevailing culture which existed⁽²¹⁾. This line of argument suggests that voters 'accommodated' themselves to the existing order and that the quiescence of working-class voters was partly shaped by what their leaders suggested was possible.

Our study of Scotland offers only some answers to these hypotheses. It may be that, while religious and other sectional loyalties did not diminish the centrality of class, they did prevent its full expression. More research is required on this theme. Equally, the experience of the rural areas suggests that there remained a different ideological perspective amongst manual workers there. But the evidence suggests the crucial importance of the interplay between the objective facts of economic change and the ideological and political perspective of the Labour Party's leadership.

20 See R Skidelsky, Politicians and the Slump (London, 1967); D Marquand, Ramsay MacDonald (London, 1977). W Runciman's views of the period are set out in his book Relative Deprivation and Social Justice (London, 1966). The suggestions that the new electorate were 'politically immature' are made in Matthew, McKibbin and Kay, op.cit.

21 F Parkin, Class, Inequality and Political Order, (London, 1971).

Chapter 2 and 3 have shown how the post-war threat to stability which saw previously unprecedented anti-government swings in by-elections was defused (and coalition promises of social reform evaporated) as Labour defined itself as a party of parliamentary power and gradual social and economic reform. A new stability was cemented by the depression, which ensured that the industrial conditions necessary for a socialist break-through were not present. Scottish Labour politicians like Maxton and Wheatley sensed that one important consequence of the recession was to diminish the possibilities for political change, and when they urged a bolder course of socialist advance in the later twenties, they were aware that they were acting not because of a popular demand for change, but in spite of it. Nevertheless, much of the weight of their attack on the Labour leadership was that the expectations of the working-class had been restrained by what politicians had said was possible, and by what kind of party Labour had become. Whatever was the precise relationship between these local and national forces, the fact was that, despite a rupture in the political system, most Scottish people were by 1929 little better housed, fed or economically secure than they had been a decade before. The political changes had not been mirrored in society.

APPENDIX ONE

HOME RULE AND THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

Scotland's distinctiveness in the British political system has always been recognised, although the degrees to which Scotland is regarded as different have varied. A conventional view in the sixties was that of Birch who suggested that 'the distinctions between the English, Welsh and Scots are cultural rather than ethnic and do not have many political consequences'⁽¹⁾. But other historians have sought to regard the differences as of more than passing significance. Thus in their study of Scottish Political Behaviour, principally based on interviews in Glasgow in the 1960's, Budge and Irwin have concluded:

There is a wide range of topics other than those related to social class upon which Scottish electors adopt a consistent attitude. Those topics relate to Scotland and Scottish affairs. The thread running through these opinions is a concern for the well-being of Scotland and fellow Scots. (2)

Thus Budge and Irwin argue that 'Scottishness' is as important a dividing line as 'class' in modern Scottish politics. The work of Michal Heckter takes this position further.

In a recent series of articles, and in a book, Internal Colonialism, Heckter has suggested that in British political behaviour in the nineteenth and twentieth century we can identify in Scotland 'the persistence of regionalism' which cannot be explained by social class.

1 His most recent work suggested a new view. See A Birch, Political Integration and Disintegration in the United Kingdom (London, 1979).

2 I Budge and D Urwin, Scottish Political Behaviour, (London, 1965).

His argument leads him to suggest that 'Scottishness' was an important factor in determining political behaviour and attitudes and that Labour benefited in the twenties from its identification as the anti-London and anti-establishment party⁽³⁾. Indeed the implication is that Labour inherited the Liberal vote partly for that reason.

The history of 'home rule' sentiment in Scotland cannot therefore be ignored and in this appendix we attempt to examine how the Labour Party in Scotland inherited and transcended the Liberal Party's pre-war commitment to 'home rule', and to examine what that commitment meant in practice. While in the early twenties the major organs of home rule sentiment were dominated by the Labour Movement it was disenchantment with Labour's performance which had brought the new national party of Scotland into being by the time of the 1929 election. The evidence suggests that it was possible to incorporate 'home rule' aspirations into Labour's appeal, although the Labour Party itself could never quite reconcile nationalist aspirations to its own views of socialist development in Britain. While activity promoting home rule was vigorous, the strength of home rule sentiment was never sufficiently strong to dominate the politics of the twenties. All this can be seen if we trace Labour's attitudes to home rule in the twenties, the position of the pressure group, the Scottish Home Rule Association, and the steps which led to the formation of the National Party of Scotland in 1928.

Attempts at devolution had been frustrated by a mixture of indecision and inertia in the years before the First World War. In 1911 the House of Commons was told that sixty Scottish MPs supported Home Rule. But some wanted radical measures of home rule for nationalistic reasons, others saw Scottish reforms as part of 'home rule all round' and as a remoulding of the British

3 Heckter, Internal Colonialism (London, 1976).

constitution. Cabinet committees discussed such proposals, including the setting up of enhanced grand committees as a first step. But while a private member's bill gained a majority (but no more parliamentary time) in the Commons in 1912, Asquith was lukewarm on the issue when he met a deputation of Scots MPs in 1913. The real problem, as Jallard suggests, was that Liberals were 'far from united' on the detail of the measures they sought and that Home Rule all round was 'a sufficiently vague and all embracing formula to mean all things to all men'⁽⁴⁾. While vigorous nationalist and devolutionist pressure groups promoted the home rule cause in Scotland before 1914, they were never in a position to bring the Liberals to the point of formulating precise legislative measures, despite the Scottish Secretary's announcement just before the outbreak of war that he proposed additional initiatives in the field.

In 1918 most Liberal and Labour candidates offered a measure of support for home rule. Indeed amongst the Coalition Government's ministers, there was support for home rule from Munro, the Coalition Liberal Scottish Secretary, and Lloyd George, the Prime Minister. This brought a Speaker's Conference in 1919 which examined but could not fully agree on various alternatives for home rule. The real problem was a contradiction between the proposals of the Haldane Committee and of the Speaker's Conference. Haldane argued that government should be administered 'on the basis of services to be performed' rather than 'the persons or classes dealt with'. Yet the Speaker's Conference was called to discuss the 'special needs and characteristics of the component parts' of Britain, and whether statutory legislatures be set up. It recommended the creation of councils, but could not agree on who should be in the devolved assemblies, or councils, existing MPs, nominated or elected representatives.

4 P Jallard, 'United Kingdom Devolution, 1910-1914, Political Panacea or Tactical Diversion,' English Historical Review. XCIV, 1979, p.785.

But the Conference represented a recognition of the demand for self-government and in the post-war years the Scottish Secretary at different times reaffirmed his support for home rule. In June 1919, when a motion supporting home rule came to the House, only one Scottish member opposed it - and, in fact, thirteen conservatives supported it - and in 1920 Munro again reiterated his support. When he met the STUC in 1919, he suggested that 'home rule is no longer a party question but a business proposition : the chief difficulty in the way has been England'⁽⁵⁾. But, in fact, throughout most of the twenties the running for home rule was made by Labour. Although the Liberals had promoted the Scottish Home Rule Council, the Scottish Home Rule Association, that was reconstituted in 1918, had Labour supporters as its dominant figures.

Roland Muirhead, a socialist businessman, was its guiding force. In September 1919, at its first annual meeting, a resolution was passed:

That this meeting representing all shades of political opinion and industrial activity being convinced that the present centralised system of government from London is inefficient and inconsistent with national sentiment resolves to form itself into a committee for the purpose of organising and focusing the Scottish demand for self government in respect of Scottish affairs. (6)

The meeting also resolved that it would work as a pressure group by promoting public meetings, press correspondence, distributing literature, holding national conventions and 'securing of pledges from Parliamentary candidates'. But the new Association was far closer to the new Labour Party than to the Liberal Party.

5 Scottish Trades Union Congress, Report, 1919.

6 Scottish Home Rule Association Newsletter, Vol.1, No.1, July 1920.

Its Committee as well as Muirhead, an ILP member, included William Gallagher of the Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society, Robert Smillie, the miners' leader, and James Maxton. A measure of its Labour strength is given by a study of its affiliated membership. Of 138 organisations affiliated in 1920, 47 were co-operative societies, 38 trade union branches and 24 ILP branches; in addition to the STUC, Scottish Mineworkers' Union, Scottish Farm Servants' Union and Scottish Horse and Motormen's Association were affiliated⁽⁷⁾. S.H.R.A. speakers were primarily ILP propagandists⁽⁸⁾.

Nevertheless the Scottish Council of the Labour Party were unhappy that initiative for home rule was being seized by an all-party pressure group, rather than the Labour Party itself. In January 1919 Maxton and Smillie, (members of the Scottish Home Rule Association Executive), were advised to work through the party's channels not the SHRA, for home rule⁽⁹⁾. The Labour Party Executive agreed that while it was in favour of home rule, 'the people of Scotland can secure this measure by a fuller support of Labour at the polls, and therefore considers it inadvisable for members of the Labour Party to associate with members of other political parties in special organisations for the purpose of home rule'⁽¹⁰⁾.

7 Cited in J Brand, Scottish Nationalism, (London, 1978), p.176.

8 Scottish Home Rule Association Newsletter, Vol.1, July 1920. The claim is made also by Brand, op.cit. p.176.

9 Labour Party Scottish Executive Committee, January 13, 1919. As early as November 1918 a letter from the Scottish Home Rule Committee signed by Maxton, Smillie, Shaw of the Glasgow Trades Council as well as Unionists and Liberals had asked for support, with Maxton accepting the proposal that a decision be delayed until the Home Rule Committee had submitted its rules and constitutions.

10 Ibid.

Despite the warning, the records of the SHRA suggest that a majority of Labour MPs were close to the association in the twenties. It was the Labour Movement to whom most home rulers looked for support and sponsorship. Labour's 1918 national conference accepted that 'there should be constituted separate legislative assemblies for Scotland, Wales and England with autonomous administration in matters of local concern'. The manifesto of the Labour Party in Scotland in 1918 supported the principles of self-determination for the Scottish people, through a Scottish Parliament and separate representation at Versailles, and in 1919 the Scottish Executive with unanimous approval from the Scottish conference laid down the foundations of new constitutional arrangements. Its report argued that:

A determined effort should be made to secure Home Rule for Scotland in the first session of Parliament...and the question should be taken out of the hand of place-hunting lawyers and vote-catching politicians by the political and industrial efforts of the Labour Party in Scotland which should co-ordinate all its forces to this end, using any legitimate means political and industrial to secure the establishment of a Scottish Parliament on a completely democratic basis.(11)

A draft constitution was proposed under which the Secretary for Scotland would summon a Scottish Parliament after elections on proportional representation with the vote open to all over 21: 'Subject to the constitutional veto, the Scottish Parliament shall have powers to deal with any Scottish matters including the levying of taxes hitherto within the jurisdiction of the Imperial Parliament at Westminster except such as determine the control and equipment of the army, navy, civil, diplomatic, dominion, colonial and other imperial services'. In a rousing speech to the Conference Ramsay MacDonald said that: 'he looked forward to the time when Scottish devolution or home rule would become enormously stronger for he was sure that if a Scottish legislative authority

11 Labour Party, Scottish Executive, 1919 Report, p.20.

sitting in the Scottish capital had powers to deal with land; to deal with democracy, to deal with education, their work would be much more effective in rebuilding a new world on the foundations of righteousness. He hoped that in the reconstruction of democracy they would lay great emphasis upon national development'⁽¹²⁾. During the 1919 debate the point was made most strongly from the Secretary of the Labour Party, on behalf of the Executive, that definite action should be taken to secure positive laws for home rule. 'The time for philosophising on the matter,' he said, 'was past.'

1919 was no accident in Labour's history. While the Speaker's Conference discussed and could not agree on the question, the Labour Party's Scottish Conference continued to press for home rule. In 1920 Conference agreed that the Imperial Parliament would be left only with 'such questions and powers as affect the British Commonwealth as a whole', and the Scottish Executive announced that a committee would work with the Parliamentary Party and the National Executive in drafting a bill. In 1921 the Executive were asked, in drafting their proposed Home Rule Bill, to examine developments in Ireland, 'a settlement of which may affect materially the constitutional position in Scotland'. The Scottish Divisional Council of the ILP was prepared to go even further. In 1919 the party had rejected a proposal for a 'Scottish socialist government in Scotland', although the ILP's Scottish Conference called for a Scottish Parliament. But by 1922 the party was demanding a constituent assembly so that Scots could meet in Scotland to determine what form a new government would take.

It was the trade union movement that provided the muscle for the demands for Scottish self-government. In his Presidential Address to the STUC in 1918, Hugh Lyon of the Scottish Carters argued that: 'if reconstruction is to take place in Scotland after the war, then

12 Ibid., p.20,21.

we should not be humbugged by writing and sending deputations to people in London who know absolutely nothing of our wants. A Parliament should be set up in Scotland thus saving time and expense and giving the people in Scotland a fair opportunity of working out their salvation',⁽¹³⁾. The STUC's election proposals of 1918 included as their first demand a Scottish Parliament. From 1914 to 1923, the STUC Annual Conferences consistently passed pro-Home Rule resolutions and when the STUC met the Secretary for Scotland in 1919, Home Rule was the first matter raised with Munro. When Munro agreed with their support for home rule and said that Lloyd George and Walter Long were also in favour, this was not enough for the STUC, and Hugh Lyon, a member of the Parliamentary Committee and leader of the Scottish Carters, suggested: 'while Home Rule was not the cause of the unrest in Glasgow it would have had an effect to some extent of preventing unrest'. While Home Rule later became less prominent in future STUC agendas, the STUC's support for home rule remained strong. It voted in 1923 for 'dominion self-government', holding to that policy for the next eight years. Indeed the conclusion that trade union leaders drew not only from failure of the strike activity in 1919 but also from the failure of the Triple Alliance to work in 1921 was that a Scottish Government would be a more effective vehicle for representing Scottish interests. In an STUC debate in 1921, the delegate from the Scottish Union of Dock Labourers argued:

There would have been no Triple Alliance failure north of the Tweed if the Scottish workers had been free to act by themselves. He complained that the Scottish workers would not move far without the consent of the great people in London. (14)

13 Scottish Trades Union Congress, Annual Report, 1918.

14 Ibid., Annual Report, 1921, p.64.

The Co-operative movement also supported devolution and home rule. As the Scottish Co-operator reported of the 1918 Scottish Co-operative Conference in April, 1918, 'there was a strong expression of opinion that Scotland must have freedom to work out its own social and political salvation...it ought to be recognised that a confederation of self-governing units was far stronger than any organisation which could be managed from any one centre'. In 1919 William Gallagher of the SCWS took over as the first President of the SHRA. Co-operative support remained strong throughout the twenties, Gallagher writing in 1927 that the Scottish Co-operative movement needed home rule to placate national sentiment and to achieve social reform which was being hampered by Conservative dominance in England.

At the 1922 General Election almost every unsuccessful and twenty six of the successful Labour candidates pledged themselves to Home Rule for Scotland. There had been some dissension within the Party's Parliamentary group in that Tom Kennedy, the Kirkcaldy MP, had argued that Home Rule should be abandoned 'to avoid factious controversy and ensure a wide sympathy beyond ordinary members of the party'. But others like Graham had argued that Labour's programme should emphasise 'the necessity of Scottish Home Rule for the decentralisation of many questions including pensions, fishery, housing, agriculture etc',⁽¹⁵⁾. In the end it was Graham's advice that won the day, and a statement was put out by the British Labour Party stressing:

The Labour Party is pledged to statutory legislatures for Scotland, Wales and England as well as Ireland as part of the larger plan of constitutional reform which will transform the British Empire into a Britannic Federation of Commonwealths and British self-governing communities. The Labour Party advocated the establishment of these local Parliaments to deal with Scottish legislation and administration in matters of exclusive local concern and the basis of complete autonomy with a council for the whole British Commonwealth.

15 Labour Party Scottish Executive, Minutes of Meeting of Executive with Scottish MP's, October 7, 1922.

As the Clydesiders made their triumphal descent on Westminster in 1922, Wheatley told newspaper reporters that 'in Scotland there is no subject which aroused enthusiasm so much as the subject of Scottish Home Rule',⁽¹⁶⁾ and during 1923 pressure for Home Rule was maintained by Labour Members of Parliament. For example, during Maxton's suspension from the House, he and nine other Labour MPs spoke to a crowd estimated at 35,000 in Glasgow in August; he argued that the experience of Westminster 'had converted him absolutely to the necessity of making a strenuous effort to keep their own parliament in Scotland'. He continued, 'we mean to tell them they can do what they like about English children but they are not going to suffer Scottish children to die'⁽¹⁷⁾. In the 1923 election thirty three Labour candidates signed the SHRA request to declare themselves in favour of Home Rule.

In January 1924 after Labour took power, fourteen Labour MPs signed a motion regretting the omission of home rule proposals from the King's speech and saying they were committed to 'a Parliament for Scotland and giving to that country a measure of home rule'. During the 1924 Parliament, a private member's bill, which reflected the Labour Party's Home Rule committee's discussions from 1920 onwards, was introduced by George Buchanan, and backed by all Scotland's backbench MPs as well as the Prime Minister and Scottish Secretary, William Adamson. Its appearance produced a nationwide campaign in its support organised by the Home Rule Association and supported prominently by Maxton, who argued in the climax of the campaign that he would prefer not to have to go back to Westminster. The bill which was modelled on devolution as it operated in Ulster and proposing a system of federal Home Rule, with Scottish MPs remaining at Westminster until Home Rule all round was achieved, came before the House in May 1924. Despite Maxton's attempt along with Buchanan, McLean and the Liberal,

16 Glasgow Herald, n.d., contained in papers of Scottish Secretariat (National Library).

17 Glasgow Evening Citizen, August 27, 1923.

McPherson, to force a vote on the matter, the Speaker allowed the bill to be talked out by Conservatives, and it was refused a second reading.

The Scottish Secretary, William Adamson, told the House during the debate that 'the Government gives the general principle of the bill their approval...what they suggest they are prepared to do is appoint a committee to examine this whole question and report to the house'. The Cabinet, in fact, asked Clynes, Lord Privy Seal, to draw up terms of reference for a committee of enquiry. Clynes then recommended a Royal Commission which the Cabinet refused on the grounds the matter was one for MPs, but when a Select Committee was suggested this was in turn ruled out because the Government lacked a Commons majority. Thus Ramsay MacDonald told 'home rulers' that while he favoured devolution, he could not take any immediate action to secure its implementation.

This was the nearest home rulers were to come to achieving a measure of Scottish self-government and it marked the climax of activity in the twenties,⁽¹⁸⁾ despite the Scottish Home Rule Association's attempts to maintain momentum by calling a National Convention in November 1924. Out of it came a draft bill which was discussed at a second National Convention in October 1926.

The Association had a rising membership, both in terms of individuals and affiliation organisations from 1918 to 1927⁽¹⁹⁾, and their activities centred on these National Conventions and on proposals for new Home Rule legislation.

18 P.R.O. Cabinet Committees, May 14, 1924 CAB.31(24)2; May 30, 1924 CAB.35(24)7; June 4, 1924 CAB.36(24)2; cited in M Keating and D Bleiman, *op.cit.*, p.81-82.

19 Scottish Home Rule Association, Newsletters. The figures given for membership have been compiled by Brand, *op.cit.*, p.177 suggesting individual members rose in number from only 327 in 1919 and 1150 in 1920 to 3,148 in 1927 and that organisational affiliations rose yearly from 81 in 1919 and 138 in 1920 to 335 by 1927.

The second Parliamentary attempt to force a home rule bill into law came in 1926 as a result of the Association's deliberations and the liaison it maintained with Scottish MPs. The new bill that was introduced by Rev. James Barr in 1927 was a more radical measure arguing for dominion status and the withdrawal of Scottish MPs from Westminster; the latter clause caused disagreement among Scottish MPs which the Association's Liaison Committee failed to resolve. Johnston, who seconded the bill, reflected a general feeling at the time among Scottish Labour MPs when he said later that the bill was 'all pretty airy fairy';⁽²⁰⁾ and it never received the full approval of the STUC, which felt it had not been consulted⁽²¹⁾. It was talked out without a vote and marked the parting of the ways between the Labour Party and nationalists who regarded home rule as the absolute priority. At the Home Rule Association's national rally of 1927, Labour MPs were absent from the Association's platform. When Roland Muirhead announced he would stand as an independent nationalist in West Renfrewshire, and the National Party of Scotland was formed after meetings organised by the Glasgow University Student Nationalists, the Scottish Home Rule Association could no longer contain its divergent elements⁽²²⁾.

20 T Johnston, Memoirs, (London, 1952) p.66.

21 M Keating and D Bleiman, *op.cit.*, p.103.

22 The story is told in *Ibid.* p. 107-108. By 1927 in addition to Labour and trade union factions there were the Scottish National Movement led by Spence, Scottish National League and Glasgow University Student Nationalists. As John MacCormick records of the 1927 Convention, 'the debate wandered backwards and forwards and finally petered out without any real decision of any kind being made'. The Convention which had 100 delegates including a number of Labour MPs, and with the Labour element in the majority were recommended by Lewis Spence to form one national party but James Barr indicated Labour MPs could not be associated with the proposal.(p.21).

Although the Association continued in being for two more years, and the STUC rejected a motion to disaffiliate immediately, its nationalists left it for the National Party. The Association voted to dissolve itself at its 1929 Annual General Meeting.

Increasingly, after these events, Labour MPs came under nationalist attack for 'appalling apathy...in face of the continued decay of the Scottish means and instruments of production and of the growth of alien control',⁽²³⁾. Muirhead had decided to stand as a National candidate in West Renfrew, as a result, he said, of unsatisfactory replies to letters from the SHRA to all candidates in Scotland about their views on home rule, although he had chosen a constituency where there was as yet no Labour candidate in the field. He argued that: 'it is now clear that so long as political parties are controlled from their headquarters in London, there is little hope for Scotland. The advent of a Scottish National Party is now imminent. If the Labour Party in Scotland had been really independent as far as Scotland was concerned the need for a Scottish National Party would not likely have arisen',⁽²⁴⁾. His position was made clear in a letter to Forward which reminded its readers what had happened in 1924:

Ramsay MacDonald and those with him (i.e. the Cabinet) had failed to give the facilities for further discussion of Buchanan's bill after it had been talked out through the intervention of Sir Robert Horne. He and his Cabinet therefore condoned the accentuation of the centralisation of Scottish affairs in London. (25)

23 Forward, September 10, 1927.

24 Forward, January 21, 1928.

25 Forward, February 11, 1928.

Johnston, who had seconded Barr's bill in 1927, wrote that the new national party was a 'capitalist agency designed to withdraw voters from the Labour Party. Had the Labour Party been given a chance and had it failed in Scotland then the creation of a new party would be another matter altogether.' He continued:

With the desire to speed up self-government for Scotland I have every sympathy but this new policy business seems to me to be a policy of despair...despite the often unreasoned abuse to which the Labour Party has been subjected on the ground that it is 'English controlled' the fact remains that it never has had a chance of translating its programme into realisation.(26)

The National Party refused to accept this argument and reciprocated the hostility it expressed. Ramsay MacDonald said in January 1928:

I wish I saw a more widespread demand for Scottish Home Rule. Its supporters however must have some sense of proportion. No Government whatever the sympathies of its ministers may be can carry such legislation as this except upon a demand which had hardly been more than whispered from Scotland as yet. (27)

In his study, The National Movement in Scotland, Brand has described in detail the numerically insignificant organisations which developed in the nineteen twenties to form the National Party of Scotland in 1928: the Scots National League, the Scottish National Movement and the Glasgow University Scottish Nationalist Association. Without the impetus of dissension in the Scottish Home Rule Association, and the disenchantment with the Labour Party, these organisations might have led to nothing. As John McCormick records of his days as a young member of the ILP and a student at Glasgow University, he was 'not satisfied' with Labour's efforts at home rule and in the summer of 1927, decided to leave the Labour Party to 'make Scottish Home Rule a live issue and

26 Forward, June 2, 1928.

27 Forward, January, 1928. To nationalists however, these views seemed to support the allegations that he had always been lukewarm on home rule.

an issue which would transcend the differences among Tories, Liberals, and socialists',⁽²⁸⁾. In April 1928, the newly formed Glasgow University Scottish Nationalist Association, itself a breakaway group from the University Labour Club, brought the Scots National League, the Scottish National Movement and members of the Scottish Home Rule Association together to form the National Party of Scotland. It required a series of compromises, as MacCormick records, to bring a National Party of Scotland into being, with the rather modest aim 'to secure self-government for Scotland with independent national status within the British group of nations',⁽²⁹⁾. In response Labour banned dual membership, regarding the National Party as the equivalent of 'the Communist or other party which it is not eligible for us to affiliate or become members of',⁽³⁰⁾. The new party's successes were few, despite a well-publicised Glasgow University Rectorial Campaign in October 1928 in which the former Liberal, now Nationalist, Cunningham Graham lost by only 60 votes to the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin. The party's first by-election contest, North Midlothian in January 1929, ended with the nationalist poet, Lewis Spence, receiving only 850 votes and a lost deposit. It was, records MacCormick, 'a bitter disappointment' ⁽³¹⁾, but the party did little better when it placed two candidates - MacCormick himself in Camlachie and Roland Muirhead in East Renfrewshire - in the general election contests of 1929. Both lost their deposits after campaigns which MacCormick records 'were amateurish in the extreme',⁽³²⁾. If Scottish sentiment was important in determining voting behaviour in 1929, it was Labour - not the nationalists - who could mobilise it. Labour was the home rule party of the twenties.

28 J MacCormick, The Flag in the Wind, (London, 1955) p.16.

29 Ibid., p.22-30.

30 Labour Party Scottish Executive Minutes, May 21, 1928.

31 J MacCormick, op.cit. p.39.

32 Ibid., p.41

What then did Home Rule and devolution mean to the Labour Movement of the twenties? There were three Bills introduced or supported by Labour members at this time. The 1922 bill rejected separation and divided powers into three different categories - retained, common, and devolved services under the Crown. It accorded with the 1919 conference decision to retain 'a constitutional veto'. The 1924 Bill introduced by George Buchanan retained to the UK Parliament major services including the Post Office, customs, army, navy, foreign affairs, and tax collection, and other matters and services constituted the devolved powers. There was to be the same representation as before from Scotland in the House of Commons (but Scottish members would abstain from voting on English matters), and the memorandum of the Bill suggested the proposals were 'an extension of the (present) policy of devolution within the United Kingdom'. A Joint Exchequer Board was to allocate finances. In speaking to the proposals, Tom Johnston asserted Scots' nationhood but said that he did not want to be accused of separation: he wanted a federal solution. The 1927 Bill was one of three produced by James Barr which arose from the Scottish Home Rule Association, preceding its break-up and demise, and it was the most radical. There was to be continuation of representation from Scotland in the House of Commons and in speaking to the proposal Johnston stated that there was 'a desire to have a worthy Parliament and a share in the administration of imperial affairs'. In short, a form of federalism was envisaged. There were to be joint services including the army, navy, air force under a joint constitutional council. Executive power in Scotland under the king was to be represented by a Lord High Commissioner. It was, said Johnston, 'a similar measure' to that of 1924 and the aim was to secure a full enquiry into the details of a devolution agreement.

In 1923 the Scottish Home Rule Association attempted to clarify the confusion on devolution in a well argued, concise pamphlet on home rule. The meaning of home rule, it said, was the creation of a National Parliament and a National Executive, but the government of the United Kingdom would have reserve matters in their control and

there would be conjoint administration in other areas. There would be separate Scottish representation in the League of Nations. The pamphlet stated:

Some people try to make a radical distinction between devolution and home rule and one Scottish MP contended that the two things were opposed to each other. Devolution means the handing over of certain powers from a central body to a subordinate body. There may be different degrees of devolution and it may assume different forms. Home Rule for Scotland is simply a variety of devolution but it has two main characteristics that make it important. First, it is thoroughgoing and complete devolution: Second, it is devolution to a nation. Home Rule is simply natural, thorough, efficient, and harmonious devolution.

The Labour Party of the twenties accepted Scots nationality and nationhood as a fact; it accepted the contentions made about Parliamentary overload and congestion; and it accepted that there must be joint or reserve matters between Scottish and British Parliaments. The Labour Party in Scotland and its MPs were never in favour of complete separation. But the stumbling-block was how to reconcile the claims of self-determination (as in the Treaty of Versailles) and functional devolution (the delegation of legislative authority), and this led to a vague commitment to home rule within a multinational, quasi-federal, state, hence the slogan, a Scottish Parliament for Scottish Affairs. Thus the constitutional question of whether sovereignty derived from the people, as socialists would wish to contend, or from Parliament, a monarchical or Parliamentary constitution, was usually glossed over. In 1918 the Scottish Parliament was to be 'subject to the constitutional veto'. In 1924 Buchanan's Bill was 'an extension of devolution' within an Imperial Parliament. In 1927 Barr's bill was for 'a sovereign state', yet that Parliament was to be subject to the British monarchy and to have shared powers. The question of federalism was left open. In 1929, the Labour Party's commitment to 'federal devolution' showed the contradiction in relief. There was to be a federation where sovereignty was seen to be diffused and a devolutionary settlement where the delegation of legislative authority was subject to the overriding power of the Westminster Parliament.

How then do we assess the home rule objectives of Maclean, Maxton, and the others who supported its principles? Maclean's conversion to Scottish independence places the issue in its context after the First World War. It was the failure of the 1919 strikes in the West of Scotland as well as his assessment of the Irish situation that made him support Scottish independence. In the Final Strike Bulletin of 12 February 1919, as the Forty Hours' Strike drew to a close, Maclean wrote, 'we must emancipate ourselves from the dictatorship of the London junta by building an organisation which will be under our control and function when we want it to function'. By late 1919, after his failure to stimulate a general strike over unemployment, and after flirting with the Socialist Labour Party, he was coming round to the strategic calculation that revolution was not possible in England, and in August 1920 he declared for Scottish independence. That this belief in the millenium on the Clyde arose more from a sense of frustration, a feeling that the revolutionaries had missed the boat elsewhere, becomes clear from an assessment of his speeches and writings. 'I am certain' he wrote to James Clunie in November 1922, that 'London will never lead the Clyde or Scotland, so we must lead ourselves'. And in 1923, he wrote in his Gorbals election address: 'Russia could not produce the world revolution. Neither can we in the Gorbals, in Scotland, or Great Britain. Before England is ready I am sure the next war will be upon us. I therefore consider that Scotland's wisest policy is to declare for a republic in Scotland so that the youths of Scotland will not be forced to die for English markets...the social revolution is possible in Scotland sooner than in England...Scottish separatism is part of the process of England's imperial disintegration and is a help towards the ultimate triumph of the workers of the world.' Thus Maclean was a Marxist first and a Home Ruler second. And it was the calculation that England was incapable of producing a socialist government that led him to favour independence in the form of a Scottish Workers' Republic.

It was this conviction of Scotland's vanguard position that stimulated the home rule aspirations of Maxton and many others. Speaking in St Andrews Hall, Glasgow, in May 1924, as Buchanan's Bill was being debated in the Commons, Maxton stated that if it got through, 'he for one would never go back (to Westminster) again - nor to Parliament. He might go to the International or to hear the Orpheus Choir, to something worthwhile but never for the sake of legislating for the British Empire...he would ask for no greater job in life than to make English-ridden, capitalist-ridden, landlord-ridden Scotland into the Scottish socialist commonwealth, and in doing so he would be rendering a very great service to the people of England, Wales, and Europe and to the cause of internationalism generally...Give us a Parliament in Scotland. Set it up next year. We will start with no traditions. We will start with ideals'.

But what was Maxton's real position? In the House of Commons later, on 9 May 1924, he said that Buchanan's Bill was not an attempt to break the Union. His aim was to have Parliaments for Scotland, England, and Wales subordinate to a single and better British Parliament. And looking back on the events of the twenties, he said on January 30 1943, at the ILP Conference:

The Scottish Nationalists came to us, who were the spokesmen of international socialism, and told us that if we were to secure their support we would have to place nationalism before international socialism in our propaganda and activities. I for one declined to do that. The ILP is the best servant of Scottish nationalism...I am not prepared at any time to whip up the population to fight for their independence from the English association.

It was therefore a strategic calculation of many in the nineteen twenties that England was incapable of producing a socialist majority, but the solutions proposed by Labour hardly reached the level of separation or independence. That is why when the Scottish Home Rule Association broke up in disillusionment after the failure

of successive governments to deliver the home rule goods, to form the National Party, in 1928, no mainstream Labour leader supported the new formation.

In its 1929 manifesto Labour committed itself to 'federal devolution'. The manifesto promised to support 'the creation of separate legislative assemblies in Scotland, Wales, and England with autonomous powers in matters of local concern'. This followed from the second full discussion of home rule at a UK Labour Party Conference in 1928. In the King's speech debate, Ramsay MacDonald said that he would instigate an enquiry at the end of 1929 into the workings of the new Local Government (Scotland) Act and that this would include consideration of self-government. But he added, 'it will not be my fault if the terms of reference are so narrow that the larger questions of Scottish self-respect and the recognition of Scottish historical authority are excluded.' In 1929 and 1930, he informed questioners that he had nothing more to add.

It has been suggested that the election of Labour MPs to Westminster killed Home Rule, that, ironically, the 1922 victories for Labour began the process of integrating the Scottish Labour MPs and Party into the British political system. But the process by which Labour became lukewarm to devolution in the late nineteen twenties is more complicated than that. Keating and Bleiman go further:

To maintain the alliance between Home Rule and Labour would have needed both a greater degree of commitment from Labour and more agreement on the meaning of Home Rule itself...As the meaning of Home Rule became clear, Labour MPs began to back away from it. The economic consequences in particular had concerned Labour and trade union leaders but if Home Rulers were defined to exclude all economic matters it would be of little importance to the Labour movement and of little interest to dedicated Home Rulers. The Labour Party had opted decisively for a UK strategy and the pursuit of power at Westminster could not be easily combined with a vigorous advocacy of a diminution of Westminster's power. Nationalism could be harnessed to a movement striving for recognition and challenging the established political order but was a

danger to a party seeking to achieve its aims within the political order. It might be an appropriate ideology for a movement of the periphery but as soon as that movement became serious about capturing power at the centre its nationalist credentials became suspect. A parallel can be drawn with the earlier history of the radical Liberals. (35)

Thus Keating and Bleiman accept that Labour's increasingly lukewarm attitude on home rule was a consequence of political success in Scotland and Britain. The evidence adduced in the chapter suggests that conclusion may not be wholly appropriate - and that while Labour lost much of its initial enthusiasm for home rule and concentrated attention on economic and social questions during the twenties, the real problem for Scottish Labour was that it wanted to be Scottish and British at the same time. No theorist attempted in sufficient depth to reconcile the conflicting aspirations for home rule and a British socialist advance. In particular, no one was able to show how capturing power in Britain - and legislating for minimum levels of welfare, for example - could be combined with a policy of devolution for Scotland.

Labour's problem in the twenties was two-fold: it was never in a sufficiently strong electoral or political position to legislate for home rule; and it appeared unable to reconcile its aspirations for changing the nature of the British state with its commitment to creating a new form of Scottish government. But lying behind Labour's inability to meet its policy on home rule was the fact that the sense of Scottish separateness was never sufficiently strong to force Labour into a more decisive stand. It would appear that issues of constitutional reform ran second to questions of socialism and anti-socialism and measures of economic and social reform. It was not so much that Labour betrayed Scotland or

35 M Keating and D Bleiman, *op.cit.*, p.107-8.

vacillated on the Scottish issue: popular demand for home rule was secondary to the demand for action on unemployment, the poor law and other social and economic questions. By the thirties questions of central planning came to dominate Labour thinking (and the Scottish element of British Labour was far weaker). It was only the rebirth of political nationalism in the sixties and seventies that brought the Scottish issue to the centre of the political stage.

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